RACHEL ARMSTRONG

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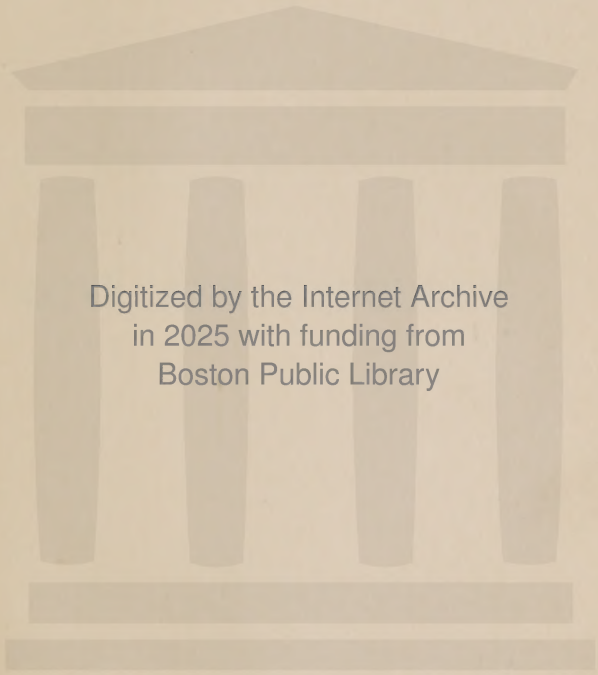
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RACHEL ARMSTRONG

OR

LOVE AND THEOLOGY

A Novel

BY

CELIA PARKER WOOLLEY

SEVENTH EDITION

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RACHEL ARMSTRONG;

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

THE DAY OF REST.

THE first Sunday of July arose cloudless and warm, the mercury in the little iron-framed thermometer that hung outside Deacon Armstrong's door climbing steadily up to the nineties as the sun rose towards the zenith. The date was one that marks the beginning of the two-months' vacation in the city, — a season of unhallowed idleness, which was sparingly cut down to the same number of weeks by the rulers of church affairs in Dennison, among whom Deacon Armstrong stood first by weight of years and religious experience. The three sextons of the three principal churches stood in their places, ready to strike the first warning note of the last bell; and it may be taken as a sign of the theological amity reigning between the different sects that the bell of each had been selected of a pitch to harmonize with the other two; so that, when the three successive strokes rang out upon the air the effect

was that of a strong melodious chord, agreeable to the ear and uplifting to the heart. The ringing of these Sunday bells always raised a feeling of solemn exaltation in the breast of Rachel Armstrong, the deacon's youngest daughter, who had been familiar with the sound from childhood, and was accustomed to obey its summons promptly.

She was standing in her room, putting the last touches to a fresh and simple toilet, when the bells began to ring. The image reflected in the mirror was that of a slight, girlish figure, with a face that combined, in an unusual degree, a grave and pensive expression with one of delicate humor. The serious look imparted by the thoughtful brow and the earnest lines about the mouth was offset in part by the hint of innocent merriment conveyed in the short upper lip and the least little upward bend of the nose. The hair was brown, with a natural wave in it, which its owner vainly tried to cure by brushing it severely, pinning it in a close knot behind; but little soft ringlets made their escape here and there, and fell like a loving caress upon the forehead and against the slim, white neck.

The image was, in truth, a fair one, which was doubtless the reason its original gave but a single furtive glance at it, standing there with downcast eyes and a conscious expression, as if the reflected figure were a real one, and challenging her for

another look. There was no need of saying so to Miss Vanity behind the glass, but she was glad to know that she was looking well, for her lover, Arthur Forbes, was at home again, and was to call and accompany her to church. The ringing of the bells outside seemed to echo the glad feelings within. Expectation was on tiptoe, for this was the last return of her lover from the divinity school, where he had finished his studies, and a new turning-point was reached in their lives. Soon he would be settled over his own parish, and then they would be married and never separated again. Her heart sang its own hymn of praise and thanksgiving, and a tender love-light flooded her face and figure as she turned and left her chamber to run lightly downstairs.

The house was an old-style, one-story and a half, frame cottage, with a square entry in the middle and a room on either side. Thinking she heard her lover, she stepped to the door to meet him ; but she had been mistaken. It was a pity he should have missed that warm, bright welcome that shone in her face, but over which the shadow of disappointment began to settle as she turned back into the sitting-room. Glancing at the clock, she saw that the bells were half through tolling, and the uneasy look deepened in her face, settling into one of impatience. If she were late at church her father, who had taken his hat and cane at the first

stroke of the bell, would reprove her; and she disliked such tardiness almost as much as he did. Such careless inattention to matters of this kind, which bore only an outward propriety in the eyes of others, savored to her of immorality. She began inwardly chiding her lover, and the little frown on her forehead did not wholly disappear when she heard a rapid step outside, and a young man, passing through the open door without ceremony, crossed the little entry, and stood before her.

Stepping quickly up to her he clasped her in a lover's embrace, which she submitted to rather than returned, looking up at him reproachfully.

"You are late."

"Yes, a little," he replied, still making no movement to go, placing his hands on her shoulders and looking fondly in her face.

"How pretty you look in white!" bending nearer to repeat the action of a moment before; but this she would not permit, slipping from him and moving towards the door. The next moment they were in the street, and he was raising her parasol to shield them both from the hot sun.

"Do take my arm," he said, in a low tone, as they walked rapidly onward. She made a hasty movement of dissent, separating herself from him by an inch's farther space, as if to prevent the

commission of any dangerous impropriety on his part.

"I don't see why," he went on laughingly, "everybody knows we are engaged;" but at this she implored him to hush, casting an apprehensive glance at a group of people they were passing.

At the next corner they met a young man of smiling countenance, smartly dressed in a suit of Sunday black, also on his way to church. When he saw Miss Armstrong he took a quick step forward, as if to join her; but, catching sight of her companion, drew back again in a little embarrassment, and allowed the two to pass by him.

"That is Mr. Knowles," she explained, as they passed beyond hearing.

"Who is Mr. Knowles?" he asked, indifferently.

"Why, he is our new superintendent," in surprise. "I thought I wrote you about him."

"Oh, yes, I remember; and you are assistant superintendent? I'm sorry I happened to be in Mr. Knowles' way. I suppose he wanted to consult you about the hymns; or perhaps there is to be a picnic. A picnic isn't just what I should approve of under the circumstances, but" —

It was evident that this kind of teasing was not to her taste; for it drew upon him a rather sharp reproof, while she bade him remember what day it was.

"I am in no danger of forgetting that," he said, in a peculiar tone that escaped her notice.

They met many people whom they knew, who stopped to shake hands with Arthur, and welcome him home, delaying their progress still farther. The bell had stopped tolling, and the choir had begun the first hymn when they entered the church, and, in obedience to her whispered directions, for she was still visibly disturbed at being late, took seats near the door.

Arthur remained standing through the hymn; but his companion seated herself, and dropped her head on the railing in front, in a few moments' silent prayer. Though bred to the forms of a plain Calvinism, Rachel Armstrong had adopted this beautiful custom of the Episcopal church, finding in it that means of withdrawal from distracting outward scenes, which devout natures like hers covet. The two looked over the same book during the second hymn. Miss Armstrong was not musical, and never joined in this part of the service; but Arthur Forbes was master of a good baritone; and, when he failed to join in the familiar strains of Greenville, she looked up at him in surprise. He understood the look, and in the next verse struck out boldly with the rest; but his voice soon flagged, and he left the choir and congregation to finish by themselves.

As they stood or sat together, the observer could

not but notice a certain pleasing resemblance which this pair of lovers bore to each other. Arthur Forbes was of slight physique, and scarcely a head taller than his betrothed. His beardless face was of the same sensitive, refined type as hers, only his wore the thin, sallow look of a student, while hers had the rounded outline and delicate coloring of a child's. There was a similar blending of gray and blue lights in the eyes of both, and each face wore the same serious and thoughtful expression, indicating an earnest and conscientious nature beneath.

The bond between these young people was a peculiar one, resting not merely on a general likeness of taste and sentiment, but going deeper, and taking root in certain life-long convictions ardently cherished by each. Arthur Forbes and Rachel Armstrong were both moral enthusiasts, with that vein of fervent religious faith which marks the devotee. Had they lived in a mediæval age they would have immortalized themselves, like many another pair of lovers, by forswearing all personal joy and profit in their relation, and uniting themselves with some sacred fraternity, thus satisfying their common need of self-sacrifice. As it was, their zeal was abated only by the natural circumstances of their lot, and they looked forward to a life of as high and difficult emprise as any they might have led in the fifteenth century.

Arthur was hardly more than a boy when he decided to be a minister, — a choice which his friends approved, and which had been warmly encouraged by Rachel Armstrong from the first. Having been bred under the rule of a strict piety, and taught to regard the clergyman's office as that of the highest earthly dignity, she found an exalted happiness in the thought that she was to share in the high privileges and duties of a minister's wife, such as her reverential fancy painted them.

When the sermon began she turned an attentive face towards the pulpit, from which her eyes did not once wander during the next forty minutes. Arthur also composed himself to listen; but he soon began to show signs of restlessness, and a discontented expression settled on his face. Shifting his position, he tried to banish disturbing thoughts by giving himself up to the contemplation of his companion's profile. Very fair and good she looked, he thought, but something in that rapt and earnest face, showing that its owner's thoughts were wholly with the time and place, troubled him. Though he could have put out his hand and touched hers, and almost yielded to the impulse to do so, she seemed far removed from him. A feeling of cold desertion swept over him, that was not allayed until, the discourse ending, and the congregation rising for the last hymn, their hands again clasped the same book and he

felt the sweep of her garments against his. After the benediction he turned impulsively towards her. "Let us hurry out," he said, quickly; "I don't want to stop and speak to all these people."

She looked at him in surprise. "You forget that I must stay to the Sunday-school," she said. He frowned a little.

"And you," she added, "are you not going into the Bible class? Mr. Barnes will expect you."

"I think not to-day; it is too warm. I — I promised Hester to come home early." He spoke with attempted ease, but avoided her eye. "I shall be round this evening," surreptitiously clasping the hand that hung at her side. "Good-by;" and before she could reply he was in the aisle, pushing his way through the crowd to the door.

Near sundown Rachel sat inside one of the vine-covered windows of the little parlor, awaiting her lover. The room was furnished in the stiff, ugly fashion of twenty years ago, with chairs of black hair-cloth ranged primly along the sides, the walls covered with one of the big-flowered patterns of that time. One feature of the room's appointments presented a pleasing contrast to the rest, — an engraved copy of Ary Scheffer's "Dante and Beatrice," framed in tasteful modern style. It was a gift from Arthur on her last birthday, and the only picture in the room, unless one could count the deacon's framed certificate of membership in the

Foreign Missionary Society. But the chief attraction in the room was Rachel herself, who still wore the white dress of the morning, and whose face glowed with the same light of happy expectation it had worn then. All traces of her slight disturbance had disappeared; and, when she heard her lover's footsteps outside, she leaned forward to smile a welcome, then rose to meet him at the door.

He led her to their old seat on the hair-cloth sofa, and the first few moments were taken up with renewed greetings and the untranslatable talk of lovers.

"It's good to be home again, Ray," he said at length, leaning his head against the purple wall-paper.

"Yes," she replied in a sympathetic tone; "but I suppose you will not be here long."

"Not just now," he replied; "but I shall not stay a great while in camp," referring to a short expedition in the woods he was to take with a friend. "A little of that kind of thing satisfies me. Besides," with an expressive look, "I would rather be at home. Perhaps you can drive out and see us."

She reminded him that she, too, was to be away on a visit to a friend in a neighboring State.

"After you return you will begin candidating, I suppose?"

He started, and drew away his arm. "Candidating?" he exclaimed. "I shall do no candidating; it is an odious business."

"'An odious business!'" she repeated in surprise; "what will you do, then?" Then, as he made no reply, "You would not accept the offer from Rochester?"

"How did you know about that?"

"Mr. Barnes told me; he says it is a very flattering offer. Why did you not tell me yourself? Did you think I would be disappointed because you declined it? I was not; I agree with you that it would be better to take a smaller parish first."

He made some unintelligible reply; and, rising, began walking nervously about the room. "I declined it,—I did not tell you, because—because—The truth is, I have no settled plans yet. I don't know what I shall do."

Though his manner puzzled her a little, she found nothing especially significant in it, and only replied that, of course, he should not be too hasty.

"Oh, there is plenty of time," he said, waving his hand to dismiss the subject. "Let us talk of something else;" and seated himself again at her side.

"Of what else?" she asked, smiling.

"Of our marriage."

She looked more serious at that, and shook her

head. "That depends on the other. You must get settled first."

"I don't see why," was the reply. Then with a little air of pride, "I shall not be dependent on a minister's salary for support. What should you say if I were to give up preaching, — for a time, I mean," as she turned an alarmed face towards him, — "and we were to be married and go abroad for a year? Ah, you would like it, Ray," laughing, and clasping her in his arms as an eager light flashed from her eyes. "Then I could have a few months' study in Germany."

She drew back, and looked at him distrustfully. "What do you want to study in Germany for?"

"Why, every young minister goes to Germany now-a-days, as a matter of course."

She was silent a few moments, and then settled herself back in her seat with an air of conviction.

"No, Arthur; it would be only an act of self-indulgence. Everybody expects you to begin preaching right away."

"Then I hope everybody will be prepared to take the consequences."

"'The consequences?'" she repeated, in a perplexed tone.

"Oh, what does a young man just out of college know about preaching? He is only stuffed with other men's ideas. All he knows is what's

inside the text-books; he ought to look about, and reflect a little."

It did not appear to her how this difficulty was to be removed by a year's further study in a German university; but, when she said so, he only replied, with a little irritation, that she had entirely misunderstood him. She saw that he was annoyed; and, feeling herself the cause, did not question him further, changing the subject by taking up a book she had been reading, and calling his attention to a passage she did not understand, asking him to explain it. He did so in a mechanical fashion, rising to replace the volume on the table. As he stood there he took up one or two others, and listlessly examined the titles. One was a collection of extracts in prose and verse for the day's use, and the other a copy of printed sermons.

"Sunday reading?" he asked with a faint smile; "do you always spend Sunday afternoons in this way?"

She flushed, and seemed a little annoyed, feeling some natural surprise at such a question from one who knew her habits so well. Then, with a little resentment, "What have you been doing?"

He raised his eyebrows a little. "Nothing," he said, "except thinking about you, and wishing that I were not so afraid of you."

"Afraid of me?" she echoed, in an incredulous tone.

"Oh, I've always been a little afraid of you!" with affected lightness. "You are so severe in your judgments of people when you do not approve of them."

She did not ask if he included himself in this class, being occupied with the main charge he had preferred, dropping her eyes on her folded hands, while she inwardly debated it.

"You mean that I am narrow and uncharitable," she said at length, looking up at him.

"A little — yes; all women are."

"Oh, well, if I am no worse than other women" —

"I did not say you were not," he retorted. "You think more than most women, and have a tyrannical conscience. The more you care for people the more exacting you are towards them."

Again she made no reply, looking down on the folded hands.

"If I, for instance," he went on in more serious vein, seating himself, and placing his arm about her, "were to do anything you disliked — I am taking it for granted, you see, that you care for me most of all. You do, don't you?"

She made no answer to this, only raised her eyes, and gravely waited for him to proceed.

"If I," he began again, "were to do anything

you considered wrong, you would be harder on me than on any one else."

A look of slowly-rising distrust and perplexity swept over her face, and she shrank a little away from him. What was he talking about? What dark, mysterious secrets lay behind her knowledge in that young man's life of his at college? He half divined her thought, and smiled.

"I don't mean anything really wrong, only something you might think wrong. There is a difference, you know."

She did not seem to know, looking at him with the same puzzled expression. "I don't like enigmas," she said at last, withdrawing her hand from his. "Have I ever been severe towards you?"

"You might be."

"Your conscience seems to be reproaching you for something."

"My conscience is always reproaching me," he replied evasively, having apparently carried the conversation as far as he desired. At that moment the loud, clanging note of the first bell broke through the quiet air, and Arthur sprang to his feet as if he had received a nervous shock. His companion also rose, and was moving towards the door, when he placed himself in front of her.

"Don't let us go to church," he said, trying to

speak at ease, but coloring over what he knew she would consider a strange request.

"Not go to church?" she repeated, in surprise.

"It is too warm. The zeal of you Dennison people in keeping up two services a day is appalling. It is the duty of all charitable folks to stay at home, and encourage the minister to close the church."

"I do not believe in closing the church," was the rather stiff reply.

"You think, I suppose, that the 'devil never takes a vacation.'" Then, catching sight of her shocked face, he seized her hand, and pressed a penitent kiss upon it. "Forgive me," he said, "I — I am not quite myself this afternoon," sinking dejectedly into a chair.

She drew near, and looked at him with affectionate anxiety. "You are not well; you have been studying too hard." She reached out her hand, and passed her light finger-tips once or twice across the flushed forehead. She was very shy in her love-making, even a slight demonstration like this being of rare occurrence, and filling her lover with mute delight. The maidenly reserve that others called coldness, and which clothed her like a garment, was to him her greatest charm. His "snow-maiden," he called her, hitherto without fear that she would melt and vanish from his sight. She suited him perfectly; and even when she displeased

him a little, it was in a way to outrank any other woman's power to please.

A halting footstep crossed the narrow entry, and the next moment her father stood in the door, hat and cane in hand. He greeted Arthur in a formal, but not unfriendly, fashion, and turned to his daughter.

"My daughter, the bell has rung," he said, in a stiff, exemplary tone. "I trust you will not be late again this evening."

"We are coming at once, sir," Arthur said, rising, and was rewarded for any sacrifice he had made by the grateful glance he received.

The night was still warm to sultriness when they left the church; and, with a young moon in the sky, shedding a faint, silvery light over everything, the temptation to linger out of doors was irresistible, and the lovers walked slowly on through the quiet streets until a late hour. They exchanged but few words, yielding themselves to the still influences of the scene, and parting with a lingering clasp of the hand at her door. Her face was suffused with a look of gentle trust and happiness as she raised it to his, where they stood together under the little porch, while his, if it had not been hidden in the shadow, might have betrayed signs of strong emotion.

"What could ever part us, Ray?" he said, holding her in a close embrace.

"Nothing," she replied, looking at him with strong, steadfast eyes; but even as she spoke, the moonlight, breaking through the leaves above, cast a strange, unearthly light upon her face, and again that feeling of sudden remoteness took possession of him which he had felt in church.

"Say that you will always be true to me," he urged, in passionate entreaty; "promise that you will trust me, — even if you do not always understand."

"Hush!" she said, withdrawing herself from him, and checking his vehemence. "Why should I not trust you? Who should understand you, if I did not?"

She bade him good-night, and he stood watching her while she passed into the house, the lamplight from within covering her like a faint halo. Then the door closed, and he was alone outside. With a murmured ejaculation, that sounded half like a blessing, half like a groan of despair, he went down the steps, and out upon the street towards his own home.

CHAPTER II.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

ARTHUR passed a restless night, and arose looking pale and unrefreshed. After breakfast he took a walk to the post-office, while his sister busied herself with the household cares, which, on Monday morning, and with a single servant, fell upon her. She was sitting on the kitchen-porch shelling peas for dinner, when her brother, on his return, seeing her, followed the gravelled walk round to the side of the house, to join her.

Miss Forbes had removed the checked sun-bonnet, which she preferred to any other head-covering when she worked in her garden, hanging it on the back of her chair, and revealing a well-shaped head, with marked angles at the brow like her brother's, abundant dark hair, brushed plainly back, and wound in a smooth coil behind, and a pair of clear, intelligent eyes, which wore a look of perfect honesty and truth. She was dressed in a dark print, trimmed with a single ruffle at the bottom of the skirt, and with a narrow linen collar at the throat. Her sleeves were turned back from the wrists, showing a pair of strong, shapely hands,

which prosecuted their present task with a skilful, unhurried movement, betokening a nature well-trained and efficient. Handing her a letter, Arthur seated himself on the upper step, and tore open the envelope of another, directed to himself.

Hester Forbes was twelve years her brother's senior; and, since the death of their father, who had been one of the first to respond to the call for seventy-five thousand, and was killed in his first engagement, and the almost immediate loss of the invalid mother, who had died of the shock, she had supplied the place of both parents to him, assuming charge of the business interests left by her father, and superintending Arthur's education until he went to college. It was through the unusual experience thus gained, the criticism she had been compelled to bear, and the knowledge, forced upon her, of the unjust discrimination of the laws against women, that she had developed those strong-minded traits for which she was distinguished, and which made her the object of some distrust among her conservative neighbors. It was known that Miss Forbes was a member of the suffrage society, and that she had, at one time, begun the study of medicine, with the view of establishing herself in that profession, closing her house at Dennison and removing to a university town near by, taking her brother with her. That something had occurred to change this intention

seemed evident from the fact that she returned at the end of a year to reopen her house and resume her former duties, looking a trifle older than when she went away, and with an additional shade of thoughtfulness in her face. The old-time prejudices and instincts of a town like Dennison were naturally disturbed by such practices as these; and, though the people breathed more freely when they learned that the medical course had been abandoned, they had never restored Miss Forbes to their entire confidence.

Hester had lived a lonely life, finding her chief companionship in books, and keeping herself abreast of the world outside by means of the newspapers and a voluminous correspondence. She was also a contributor to a few periodicals, most of them devoted to reform, and had attained some reputation as a speaker at the conventions and public gatherings, which she frequently left home to attend.

Up to the time of his majority she had exercised a close guardianship over her brother; but of late years she had as scrupulously refrained from any interference with his plans or wishes, never seeking to coerce or influence his opinion. She would have been better pleased had he chosen the study of law, and devoted himself, with her, to the extinction of those abuses from which she suffered in a personal and representative capacity; but, when

he decided in favor of the ministry, she expressed no disappointment. Unlike many people who hold strong convictions of their own, she did not make them the rule for the belief and conduct of others; and, while constantly laboring to shape and direct the world's action, to mould public opinion, and change the destiny of mankind, she conscientiously refrained from bringing her personal wish or feeling to bear upon the lives of those around her.

She had watched her brother closely since his return, reading the signs of some inward trouble in his face, whose cause she suspected; but, in accordance with her usual methods, she had taken no notice of it, leaving him free to seek her help and counsel when he chose.

Arthur's letter was short; and, as he refolded it, he explained that it was from his friend, Tom Fletcher, who was to join him in Dennison in a day or two, when they were to set out on their expedition to the woods. She made some suitable reply, and began reading her own letter. It was written on thin paper, in a running, feminine hand, that covered several pages, yet apparently had but little to say, as the reader soon mastered its contents, and, replacing it in the envelope, laid it to one side.

"From Virginia Fairfax, isn't it?" Arthur asked, in an idle tone, as their eyes met. "I thought I

recognized the handwriting. It covers a good deal of space, like some of her opinions."

"She asks if she can come and make me a visit," his sister said without noticing this criticism.

"Write, and put her off for a week," was the quick reply.

"And says she will be here to-morrow."

"Asks if she can come, and says she will be here to-morrow!" cried Arthur, with a touch of exasperation. "That is quite like Virginia."

"I am sorry you dislike her so much," the other said, as she resumed her task.

"Oh, I don't dislike her; only I wish she wouldn't ask so many questions. She is like an animated interrogation-point."

"I thought young gentlemen just out of college liked to answer questions."

"I'm an exception, then," was the gloomy response. "I've been asking too many questions myself."

There was a hint of ulterior meaning in these words that compelled attention, and for a moment the eyes of brother and sister held each other in mute question and reply. Then the young man drew a long breath, and spoke.

"I have something to say to you, Hester."

She lifted the pan of peas from her lap, and placed it on the floor. "Shall we go into the house?" she asked.

He made a motion of dissent, as if unwilling to submit to even that slight delay, and she turned towards him and waited with attentive face for him to proceed.

It did not appear that his communication gave her much surprise, nor, on the other hand, that he had expected it would.

"I have been expecting this," she said after a moment's silence. "It was sure to come sometime, and it has been easy to gather all that you have told me from your letters, — not from any special information they contained, but from their general tone." Her manner showed neither dissatisfaction nor approval at what she had heard, while Arthur had relapsed into his former dejected mood. He was thinking how the general tone of his letters to some one else had quite failed to convey any such intelligence. Her next question showed that she had read his thoughts.

"Have you said anything to Miss Armstrong about this?"

He groaned, and turned away his head.

"That is the miserable part of the whole affair. It was so difficult to write — I kept putting it off — I thought it would be easier to explain when I saw her; but now I know that will be the hardest way of all."

There was a look of pity softening the rebuke in his sister's eyes, as she listened to this confes-

sion; but her reply sounded harsh and unsympathetic.

"It will be all the harder," she said, "as it leaves you under the suspicion of having acted dishonestly all this time."

"I know you think me a great coward," with some bitterness. She made no reply to this; and he fell into a despondent revery that lasted several moments, bending forward and covering his face with his hands. At length he raised it again.

"Do you think she will take it very hard?" he asked. Perhaps it was because the pleading face so strongly resembled the boy's who had studied at her knee, and brought all his childish troubles to her, that she forbore to pain him with a direct answer.

"I know her so little," she began; a singular admission, but there had never been any intimate relation between Miss Forbes and her brother's betrothed, the unlikeness of all their thoughts and habits having kept them apart until there was hardly more than a formal acquaintance between them.

"But women always understand each other," Arthur replied. His sister received this statement with that commiserating smile with which one sex listens to generalizations upon itself from the other.

"Remember how she has been brought up," she

said at last, "and what a conscientious nature hers is. The belief of a lifetime is, of course, very dear to her."

"But you do not think it will be the cause of any real trouble between us," he cried, growing alarmed at these evasions. "She would not give me up for so slight a cause as that? — Why, it would be monstrous!" as the other continued silent. "A mere difference of opinion; women don't care for opinions so much as that."

He ended in a tone of determined hopefulness it seemed cruel to check; but he had chosen a false line of argument, which his listener felt bound to oppose.

"Most women do not, that is true, nor most men." Miss Forbes never made a damaging reflection upon her own sex without some qualifying clause of this kind. "But Miss Armstrong is not one who forms opinions lightly or rejects them easily. She is too faithful and earnest for that. It is for those very traits that you love her, is it not?"

There was no reply to this, Arthur tearing a branch from the climbing woodbine which shaded the porch, and beginning nervously to strip off the leaves. There was mingled gall and sweetness in this praise, which it was a delight to listen to, though made to turn to such disadvantage against himself.

"In asking her to give up her belief for yours, you ask her to change her nature."

"I do not ask her to give up her belief for mine," he quickly replied.

"It amounts to the same thing; in changing yours, she will think your nature is changed."

"One would think your sympathies were with her, and that you wanted her to give me up!" he said. with some indignation.

"Not at all; I only want you to understand that a woman may hold to her views on such subjects as firmly as a man, and that"—

"Oh, I don't care how firmly women hold to their views!" he broke in. "You are always so quick to take up that end of a question. I am willing women should have anything they want; I never denied them the ballot."

"It is not a question of the ballot," his sister replied, with dignity. "It is a question of remaining true to one's convictions, and acting consistently."

"Then you think it would be more consistent in her to give me up?"

"I do not say that. That is for her to determine. I only ask you to remember that, however she decides, she is likely to act from as just and honest motives as you do."

But Arthur was not in the mood to take this impersonal view of a matter so nearly related to

his happiness; and, rising to his feet, he walked resentfully into the house, going to his room, where he remained the rest of the day.

Hester Forbes was more of a stoic than a Christian. She did not mean to be harsh or ungenerous; but it was always the logical bearings of a question that impressed her first and chiefly. She had not lived to the age of thirty-seven without experience of sorrow; and as she had been able, in the day of her own trial, to regulate her conduct according to strict reason, she looked for the same rational behavior in others. Her error lay in the assumption that the natural balance between the emotional and reasoning faculties, which marked her own character, could be as easily attained by an ardent, poetic temperament like her brother's. The possibility of there being a sliding-scale in morals, adapted to a varying condition of human struggle and need, had never remotely suggested itself to her, and the suggestion would have both perplexed and displeased her.

As for Arthur, he had lately reached the flattering conclusion that he could be logical too; but logic, he argued warmly to himself, did not cover everything. A man could not base his happiness on a proposition in Euclid, and it is absurd to talk in that dry, pedagogic fashion about the necessity of a woman's living up to her convictions as a man did, stifling her heart to meet the demands

of a narrow and calculating judgment. He had always yielded a careless acquiescence to his sister's views on these matters, thinking that, if he were a woman, he should probably feel as she did, and standing ready to defend her against much of the disagreeable opposition she was obliged to meet; but now he felt ready to forswear the whole business, and reflected with much satisfaction that Rachel Armstrong had never adopted these new ideas, finding no warrant for them either in her own feeling or in the Scriptures. "A woman always goes to extremes," he said to himself, repeating the favorite argument of his sex. Let her once get the idea that logic is her *forte*, and Heaven knows what vortex of conflicting syllogisms man's mental peace is likely to be wrecked in! She will seize the first premise her wandering fancy lights upon, and follow it to whatever bitter or whimsical conclusion it may lead. Women should be reasonable, of course; he had a contempt for any other kind, — women who behaved like children, and whose talk was made up of silly inconsequent gabble; but it should be the reasonableness that assists men's, and helps maintain the general intelligence at the proper level. Any other kind can result in nothing but loss and disaster all round.

So youth tries to persuade itself that the moral helplessness sure to result from its first disappoint-

ment is the best insurance against such disappointment, — an argument which the rest of the world knows to be as vain as it is weak. Yet those anxious Mentors who try to persuade youth of its error, or to act upon any other judgment than its own, hinder as often as they help, and meet with natural failure.

CHAPTER III.

THE CONFESSION.

BESIDES his youngest child, Rachel, Deacon Armstrong's family consisted of a married daughter, who, after her husband's death, had returned to her father's house, bringing her two children with her.

The mother had died two years ago, a meek and timid spirit, who owned no law apart from her husband's will, and with quaint, old-fashioned ways, that had descended in part to her youngest daughter. There was also a son; but his name had long been a forbidden word in the household. From early boyhood Richard Armstrong had rebelled against his father's control, and at last had run away from home, boarding the midnight train with a reckless companion, and making his way to the distant West. He had never communicated with his family since. This blow killed the mother, whose silent nature had gone out wholly to her handsome, wilful boy. From the day of his flight she began to droop and pine, though she uttered no complaint, mutely fulfilling all her duties, and bearing herself with the same deferential meekness as before; but upstairs, in an

unused chamber, was a bureau-drawer, that no one ever opened but herself, containing a boy's soiled cap, a broken slate he had one day thrown to the floor in a fit of childish rage, one or two school-books, a ball, and piece of twine. These she would finger over, and put back in their places with an air of timorous guilt, and no tearful outbreak to assuage the feeling of dry misery at her heart. What had she done that God should make her the mother of a wicked son like that, — a boy who hated control from the first, made friends of the worst companions the village afforded, and openly ridiculed religion and the church? She felt herself a sinful woman, setting herself against the decrees of Providence, and her husband; that she was unable to banish the memory of this son, and uproot the feeling of tenderness that filled her heart like a dumb pain.

When the oldest daughter dressed the thin, wasted figure for the coffin, she found a small locket hanging from the withered neck, containing the picture of a laughing two-year old boy; and read a history she had only guessed before, hiding the little miniature carefully from sight within the folds of the black shroud, and feeling an impulse to pray for the peace of her mother's soul that her Protestant training did not warrant.

Rachel Armstrong was her father's favorite child, her grave and reflective disposition yielding

readily to his severe methods of training. The belief that life is a discipline whose chief end lies in the extinguishment of all the natural instincts and affections was one that she had imbibed along with her early reading-lessons. Her own life had been as quiet and uneventful as that of some pale *religieuse*. Her father's limited income and the narrow range of her native village had afforded her scarcely an outlook into the world beyond; so that, though she was a woman of mind and accomplishments, she was ignorant of many things, and strangely unobservant of the real mental life and achievements of the age in which she lived. She was, however, neither so crude nor submissive as not to be aware at odd moments, and in a vague troubled way, of the limitations of her lot. Certain rebellious moods and fancies overcame her at times, and she found herself in a state of wilful self-assertion, mastered by an intense longing for a life fuller, freer, richer than any she had yet known. At such times the plain and meagre surroundings of her home affected her with a sense of physical discomfort; the sight of the little parlor with its purple wall-paper and slippery chairs grew almost hateful to her. Then, in a spirit of childish defiance, she would treat herself to some unallowed luxury, purchasing the latest novel to store her mind with its images of unreal men and women, or indulging in some piece of feminine

extravagence, a bright scarf or a bit of costly lace, sure to be repented of, and hidden out of sight. But the genius of repression, cultivated from babyhood, was strong within her, and helped her to overcome these fits of spiritual rebellion. She had been taught that questions of taste were only the more subtle devices of a spirit of worldly vanity, and was able, for the most part, to close her mind's eye against the defects in her surroundings. The wives of the Pilgrim Fathers could have cared very little about furniture and wall-paper, and Miss Armstrong was determined to build herself on the most difficult models. Arthur Forbes shared this moral sensibility, but in masculine fashion, caring little for the chance to live except to embody in his life and work those high moral ideals which had always possessed him, and help bring the world to an acceptance of the same.

The years which her lover had spent in the divinity-school Rachel had employed in teaching, — an occupation which suited her very well, and served to piece out the family income. Just now she was making busy preparations to spend a part of the long vacation on a visit to a friend in another State, which it had been arranged should take place at the same time as Arthur's camping expedition, that they might lose as little as possible of each other's society.

The two were seated together in the little parlor

the afternoon following Arthur's interview with his sister. The latter had rehearsed to himself several times the manner which he should enter upon the communication he had to make, always in a different way, and giving it up at last in despair, saying he must leave it to chance. He listened with a preoccupied air while his companion talked, taking up the other end of a strip of muslin she was hemming, and mechanically snipping out little triangular pieces with the scissors he had purloined from her work-basket. When she looked up, and saw what he was doing, she uttered a little cry of dismay, gathering up her work beyond his reach.

"You are as bad as Benny," she exclaimed. "Here is a piece of paper, if you must have something to cut; only you must do as he does, and promise to pick up the pieces." She handed him the torn scrap of a letter, which he gravely took and began cutting, the pieces falling in a small white shower upon the carpet.

This pretence of occupation gone, he sought no other; but, leaning back in his chair, sat watching her with a disturbed and anxious expression. A short, quick sigh escaped him, and she glanced up at him. He looked pale and tired; and, though she was not given to feminine alarms, she repeated the remark of Sunday evening that he was not well, and urged him to set out for the woods at

once. He explained to her that he must wait for his friend, Tom Fletcher. A little shadow flitted over her face.

"You don't like Tom," he said, in a disappointed tone.

"I don't know," she replied, hesitatingly. "I have seen very little of him; he has such a light way of talking."

Arthur smiled. "Tom is something of a worldling, that is true; but you ought not to be hard upon him. It isn't every one who has had the advantage of being born and brought up in Dennison."

There was an effort at irony in these last words impossible to overlook.

"What's the matter with Dennison?"

"Oh, Dennison is a great place! It must be to offer such superior attractions to a young woman I know, over a year's residence abroad."

She looked up at him, her needle suspended in her hand. There was a serious accent in this banter that arrested her attention; but he smiled as her eyes met his, and she seemed reassured, bending her head again over her work.

"Mr. Fletcher has been abroad, I suppose?"

"No, it isn't necessary for him. Tom is a born cosmopolite as it is, — one of those who know all about Europe without seeing it."

"That's very convenient; but isn't it a little shallow, too?"

"Oh, well, Tom doesn't pretend to go into the profundities. He's a good fellow, though, and getting a good start in his profession; but Tom is one who is sure to succeed anywhere. He takes the world as he finds it; he has no fantastic notions of duty to stand in the way of his happiness."

"I don't understand how any notion of duty can be called fantastic."

"Oh, a person can go to extremes in a question of duty and conscience as well as in anything else."

She looked at him attentively a moment. "Did you learn that at college?" she asked; "or perhaps that is what you were expecting to learn in Germany."

"Why are you so opposed to going to Germany?" changing his tone and speaking in his most serious manner.

She bent her head over her work, and remained silent. There was a touch of quiet obstinacy in this action, which nettled him.

"There is no reason in the world why we should not go," he went on, in a quick, urgent tone; "and I—I must go—I have quite made up my mind about it."

She flushed, and her needle moved a little faster.

Her pride was touched. If he was so bent upon going, choosing between her and a few months' residence in Europe, she would say nothing to defeat his intentions.

Arthur, absorbed in the thought of what remained to be said, had not noticed the effect of his words, dropping his head in a few moments' painful reflection. Then he sat upright, and a look of decision replaced the irresolute expression his face had worn before. Leaning forward, he covered the hand which was guiding the needle with his own.

"Put up your work, Ray," he said; "I have something to say to you."

"But I can listen and sew too," she replied, still a little obstinate, and her mind fixed on Germany.

"No, dear, put it away; it is something very serious."

Something in his voice and manner struck her more than his words, and she looked up at him with a questioning face, letting her work fall in her lap. He took both her hands in his.

"You know how much I love you, Ray, and that not for the world would I give you a moment's unnecessary pain" —

He paused, and the wondering look in her face deepened.

"And if what I am about to say pains you, and even displeases you a little, as I am afraid it will,

remember that it is only because I want to be true, — true to myself and to you." His voice had taken on a pleading tone, while an expression of undefined alarm began to creep over her face; and she drew a little away from him, attempting to remove her hands, which he would not permit.

"What is it you have to say to me?" she asked, rather peremptorily.

"It is this, Ray; I shall never be a minister."

In this blunt fashion did he impart the dreaded news at last, which he had meant to reveal by gradual stages. She offered no word of reply to what he had said, only gazed at him with wide, uncomprehending eyes, shrinking still farther away from him.

"At least not the kind of minister you think," he added in a conciliating tone; but this only seemed to puzzle her the more.

"What kind then?"

Arthur aroused himself to a full performance of his task. He began by giving her a rapid review of certain mental experiences through which he had passed during the last year, and the change which had taken place in many of his views. He explained to her how the old doctrines, once so acceptable to him, and which he had meant to preach in a pulpit of his own, now appeared as so many dead and useless dogmas which he had determined to renounce; and how he had also resolved never

to submit himself for examination as a minister of the church in which he had been reared. He begged her to try to understand how these doubts had been slowly forced upon him at first, how he had struggled against them, seeking the counsel of his teachers and elders, but to no purpose; until at last he had thrown aside all his fears and scruples, and entered on a bold investigation of matters precluded from such study, with the result of reaching, as he deemed it, higher and more tenable ground. He was proceeding to make a logical demonstration of this last claim, carried away by his own thought, when a glance at his companion suddenly checked him.

Rachel Armstrong's face wore the cold, averted look of one whose sympathy is wholly withdrawn, combined with one of sudden fear and dislike; and the thought pierced Arthur like a sharp pain that he had shut himself out from all compassion and desire to understand on her part. With a stifled groan he rose, and walked to the other side of the room.

"Why have you not told me all this before?" she asked after a few moments' portentous silence.

"There I admit I have been wrong, Ray," he made haste to reply, coming back to her. "I acted weakly, and was unjust to you; but I thought I could explain matters better when I saw you. I should have remembered, though, that it would

take time to reconcile you to these new opinions, and that you could not be expected to approve of them at first."

There was a note of tentative hope and entreaty in these words, that produced no effect.

"It would have made no difference," she said coldly. "It is enough for me to know that you are not what I thought, what you have always led me to believe. You are an infidel."

"Ray!" In spite of his new theories, he still retained his old dislike and dread of an epithet which, he had been taught, embodied the worst form of wickedness, and he shrank from its application to himself as from a blow.

"Are you not?" she asked. "You do not believe in the Bible any more."

"I have not said I did not believe in the Bible."

"But how?" she asked, turning a cold, distrustful look upon him that quite unnerved him.

He hesitated, and began to stammer out an explanation. Certainly he did not accept the Bible as literal truth; no intelligent person did now-a-days; even Mr. Barnes would hardly go so far as that. But it was a book that, of course, would always be of great historical value, and rank with the finest literature in the world.

"Literature!"

She rose to her feet, her work falling to the

floor, and the small silver thimble rolling over the carpet and hiding itself under a distant chair.

"That will do," she said; "we will talk of this no more."

"Dear Ray," he said, coming towards her, and taking her hands, "I am afraid we must talk of it, — a little. Do not think," he went on, "that I want to change your opinions. I know how dear your belief is to you; I am willing to leave all that to time. All I ask is an equal charity on your part, and liberty to act on my convictions."

"Take your liberty by all means," she replied, withdrawing her hands with a gesture of renunciation.

He would not admit any special import in her words, but again placed himself before her as she turned away.

"You must be patient with me," he urged. "Heaven knows I purchase my liberty very dearly at the expense of your pain. And, after all," he continued, in a lighter strain, "how many married people differ in their religious beliefs!"

She looked at him with a sad, rebuking searchingness.

"That was not to have been our life, though." And for the first time her voice trembled a little, and sank.

These words struck home, and Arthur hung his head as he recalled that image of a close and per-

fect union they had so often pictured to themselves. Theirs was to have been no common marriage, content to reap a mere material gain and happiness, but a true wedlock of mind and soul, animated by the same lofty purpose and desire in both. As each looked and caught the mournful reflection of this lost ideal in the other's eyes, it was as if they stood by the grave of their first-born, save that such a grief would have drawn their hearts still closer together while this seemed to hold them apart. A softer, if not relenting, look stole over her face, and he held out his arms. She turned away, but he took a step forward, and clasped her impetuously to his heart, where she gave way to a passionate burst of tears, clinging to him and calling him by name. This violent outbreak soon passed, and she rested a moment in his arms, quiet and spent.

"Say that it will not be quite like what we dreamed at first," he replied. "There is still a great deal of happiness left for us, Ray."

She did not reply to this, only quietly withdrew herself from his arms, and raised her tear-stained face to his.

"Will you go away, now?" she asked, in a low voice.

He looked surprised, and a little hurt. "Certainly, if you wish it," he said, but lingered still, looking anxiously at her.

"After all, you had better stay," she said, reflecting a moment, and sinking into a chair with a tired motion. "We may as well finish what we have to say on this subject now."

"No, no!" he exclaimed, catching the hint of a new alarm in her manner. "I will go, — I ought to go; you have had too much to bear already." He bent over her, and took her hand.

"It will make no difference," she said, wearily.

"Of course, it will make no difference," he replied, with forced cheerfulness, putting his own interpretation on her words. "We love each other, — we always shall love each other. Everything else sinks into insignificance beside that."

She did not try to answer him, but sat leaning her head against the back of her chair, looking pale and exhausted.

"I cannot bear to leave you like this," he murmured, hanging over her.

She rose from her seat. "I will go to my room," she said.

He supported her to the foot of the stairs in the little square entry, where he stooped and pressed a kiss on her cold cheek before he released her. He stood looking after her, while she slowly climbed the steps, and, turning at the top, with no backward word or look, disappeared from view. Then he took his hat, and, with a depressed heart and increased dread for the future, left the house.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISITOR.

ARTHUR reached home just in time to see the omnibus drive up, and to assist its single passenger, Miss Virginia Fairfax, to alight, relieving her of shawl-strap and satchel, and accompanying her up the walk to the front door, where Hester stood waiting to receive her friend. The greeting between the two women was cordial, and, on the visitor's part, quite effusive.

Virgina Fairfax was one of Miss Forbes' enthusiastic admirers. They had met at one of those reform conventions both were in the habit of attending, and some word of Hester's, spoken from the platform, had fired Virginia's imagination, which was of an inflammable order, and their friendship dated from that moment.

Miss Fairfax had been, as she had explained to her new friend, hovering on the brink of reform for some time, but had now plunged boldly over, and was ready to undertake any work in its behalf that might offer. There was little indeed that she could do, she said, with an honest attempt at humility. She could neither speak nor write ; she could only give money, — a qualification that proved

quite acceptable, and gave her high rank among her fellow-laborers at once. Miss Fairfax was the owner of a small fortune, and leader in the first circles of the city where she lived, who was noted for her graceful hospitalities and handsome costumes. Accomplishments like these which, before, had served only to grace existence, and make the time pass, were now turned to the noble end of reform. It was understood that Virginia's special labors in the propagation of the new ideas she had adopted were to be in the social field, a trust which she readily accepted with an air of smiling complacency that bespoke innumerable triumphs to come.

Miss Fairfax was determined to prove that the natural attractiveness of woman was not endangered by a belief in the ballot and the coeducation of the sexes. If Hester, she thought, would but add another flounce, or an extra breadth of drapery to the plain black silk in which she invariably appeared, the effect of what she had to say would be increased tenfold; but Hester wouldn't, and Virginia felt her own duty the more imperative. A new zest was thus added to her shopping excursoins; and when, dressed in one of her new costumes, she made her appearance in the committee-room or on the public platform, where she sometimes sat as scribe, or to shed the light of her countenance, the result, though it could not be set down

in the minutes, was always marked and conclusive. To do her justice, though, Virginia was not in the least vain of her clothes; only the sense of being well-dressed, having been habitual from childhood, the knowledge that, in adopting her new theories, she need not forego all thought of her appearance afforded some natural relief. She liked, she said, to put her theories in practice as she went along, — an easy task when one is young and a social favorite. Virginia, however, was not so young as she had been, and took a wilful pleasure in telling her age, — twenty-six next birthday. Among gentlemen she numbered many friends and admirers, few of whom, however, had hinted the wish to assume a nearer relation; though Miss Fairfax was not without the knowledge, present to most women so fairly circumstanced, of certain men within the circle of her acquaintance whom she might easily marry if she chose; but she did not mean to marry in that way. She had her own ideal of courtship and a lover, an ideal combining the mingled elements of romance and reason, derived from middle-age sentiment and our own. A lover who should be at once a hero and a rational creature, was what Virginia's imagination now demanded; not so much in concrete example, — an actual lover, who should proceed at once to offer her his hand, — for that would have been unwomanly, as an ideal abstraction, with personality

quite undetermined as yet. Such an image alone was fit to occupy the thoughts of a perfectly emancipated woman; and such a lover would deserve to take forcible possession of her fancy as Geraint did of Enid's, yet would never exact such wifely submission as Enid yielded, since he would hold the same advanced opinions on such matters she did. Not that Virginia would have been content to marry a masculine copy of herself, a man who was always repeating her opinions as his own, and looking up new references to Semiramis and Joan of Arc in support of their united opinions. On the contrary, he must have arrived at these principles by virtue of their inherent reasonableness, holding them securely in mind along with a mass of other wisdom. Altogether a man whom she could respect and look up to, but whom she need not look up to unless she liked.

To dwell so long on Virginia's ideas of marriage makes it appear that this subject engrossed a large share of her thoughts; but to those who knew her best, no such vulgar conclusion was possible. She was well content with her life as it was, having one of those natures which lavishes itself in turn on every passing moment and its affairs. Now that she had come for a few weeks' visit to Dennison, all her interests would centre there, and she would enter with sympathetic delight, as on the pages of an unread novel, into the

lives and histories of all the people she met. This impartial admiration which Miss Fairfax always evinced for her latest acquaintance or surroundings drew upon her the charge of affectation, one she was familiar with, and stood ready to admit. She was affected in the sense that she was always self-conscious. Nothing seemed more spontaneous than her manner; yet she always had a vision of herself, how she looked and moved and spoke, even when she seemed most absorbed in other subjects. "She is always acting" was the remark frequently heard of her; and there was a dramatic quality in all her words and actions that gave force to this criticism; but those who believe that the actor's art is incompatible with sincerity and native goodness may reply to this charge. As Virginia stood in the large front chamber assigned to her use, she looked her twenty-six years; but it was easy to believe she would never go far beyond that limit. She had a tall, well-formed figure, that never took on an ungraceful line or gesture, a sallow skin, and rather thin face, lit up by a pair of dark eyes and a brilliant smile; and she moved with a quick, elastic step, which set all her rustling draperies astir.

She had taken off her travelling-dress and put on a light dressing-robe to unpack her trunk, and already the room was a scene of graceful turmoil, with boxes and brushes strewn about the floor,

and a number of vari-colored dresses hanging over the chairs. As Virginia talked rapidly on, covering a dozen topics with a breath, Hester began quietly moving about and hanging the dresses in a large closet.

"You dear Hester," her friend exclaimed, waylaying her on a passage across the room, and placing both hands on her shoulders, "I have come to stay a month. What will you do with me?"

Hester smiled, and said she would try to manage it. The relation between herself and Virginia was a puzzling one to her friends, and not clearly understood by herself. She only knew that, without entirely approving of her, or wholly believing in the strength of her attachment to those things which she herself held to be of paramount importance, she liked to have Virginia about her. Something in that bright, chatty presence seemed to supplement and piece out the gray and fading fabric of her own years with a little needful life and color. Then, it is always difficult to resist belief in the worth of one who sincerely likes and believes in us. Love is contagious, and seldom fails to win its reward by creating a feeling something like itself; and Virginia's affection was of that ardent, demonstrative kind, which would have won a response from the most unemotional creature living, and Hester Forbes was not that.

"I have brought Lecky's Rationalism for us to read together," Virginia said. "I want to do a lot of solid reading while I am here, — to catch up. I have been dreadfully frivolous all winter, — receptions and parties without end. But you know what I think of such things. I can always manage to get in a word some way about higher things. We've got a perfectly immense petition to send to the legislature this fall; and Mr. Baxter — he's State senator — you know, has promised me to give it his personal attention."

Hester expressed her gratification at this news, and went on with her work of hanging up the dresses. A few moments after she spoke of her brother, saying that when he went away they would be quite by themselves and have all the leisure they wanted.

"I had forgotten he was at home," said Virginia; "perhaps I ought not to have come so soon?" in a doubtful tone. "I am afraid I shall interrupt your visit with him."

"Oh, not at all," Hester replied, in that hurried manner in which we seek to exculpate our friends for an error we have silently charged against them.

"He will begin preaching now, I suppose," Virginia said.

"Not immediately, I think," was the hesitating reply. "He is talking of a year's study in Germany."

"Oh, yes, he ought to go to Germany, of course," the other replied, arranging the toilet-bottles on the dressing-case before her. Then, a moment after, "Didn't you tell me he was engaged to be married?"

"He is engaged to Miss Armstrong."

Virginia reflected a moment. "Did I see her when I was here before?"

Hester replied in the affirmative, and described the time and place.

"Oh, yes, I remember; she is very pretty; but I thought she seemed rather shy. I could not draw her out."

"I don't think she is shy," the other said.

"I suppose they will be married, and go to Germany for a wedding-trip? That will be delightful."

"That is very uncertain," Hester replied, the troubled look on her face increasing. She had caught sight of her brother's countenance as he mounted the steps with their visitor, and its distressed look still haunted her. She closed the closet door, and, coming back, seated herself with a thoughtful air.

"I don't know," she began reluctantly; "perhaps I ought to tell you" —

"Oh, is there something to tell?" Virginia exclaimed, wheeling about, and seating herself in a low rocker opposite her friend, and fastening large, expectant eyes upon her.

"Poor Arthur! he is in trouble," his sister began, and related what had taken place. "He had just come from her house when he met you," she ended.

"Mercy!" cried Virginia, dismayed at the part she must have played in the young man's thoughts. "And had to take my satchel and pay the driver! He will hate the sight of me."

"Well, the world must go on just the same if we are in trouble; and if we are reasonable we shall look at it in that light," said Hester.

"Yes, of course," Virginia assented, trying to bring her feelings up to the correct standard, but convinced that she had made a most disagreeable impression, sure to last.

"You don't suppose she will cast him off just for that, — a mere difference of opinion?" she said, repeating Arthur's words of the day before.

"We must try not to blame her if she does," Hester replied. "She has been brought up very strictly."

"Well, for my part, I don't see how women can be so bigoted."

"Why should we call it bigotry?" the other asked, in a judicial tone. "Why shouldn't she hold to her belief, if she considers it the true one? Isn't that what we are trying to teach, — that women should show the same courage aud self-reliance in such things as men?"

"I had forgotten about the men. You are always so strong, Hester. If ever I grow weak or uncertain, I'll come to you — or run away," in a lower tone. "But I can't help feeling sorry for them both, especially for your brother. I am something of a skeptic myself, you know."

This last statement was made in a confidential tone, as though it conveyed a piece of real news. Miss Forbes did not appear to hear it.

"I don't say much about it," Virginia continued in the same manner; "I don't want to disturb other people's faith."

Without replying or praising her for this consideration, Hester rose to go below. It was not like her, having once decided upon a course of action, to hesitate and seek to retrace her steps; but the secret she had parted with was not her own; and, though Virginia's intentions were always good, her discretion was sometimes at fault.

"I have told you this," she began again in some embarrassment, "because I thought it would be better for you to know. With this trouble upon him Arthur is not likely to be a very agreeable host; but you will understand now and overlook" —

"Oh, I understand, — I understand perfectly. You can trust me, Hester," the other said, accompanying her to the door. Closing it, she went back to the arrangement of her toilet-bottles.

"Poor things," she said, reflectively, to her image in the glass. "But if it is a matter of conscience with her, as Hester says — These church women are so narrow — And to think of my coming up at such an unlucky moment; he certainly will detest me." She looked plaintively at the mirrored figure opposite, as if soliciting its sympathy. Then, removing the comb from her hair, and letting the dusky mass fall over her shoulders, she began her toilet for supper.

CHAPTER V.

A SURPRISE.

THE next day passed, and Arthur Forbes made no attempt to see his betrothed, thinking it the part both of wisdom and delicacy to wait a while, and hoping she would summon him to her presence. When, therefore, one of the neighbor's boys called the next morning with a letter, directed in the small, neat hand he knew so well, he snatched it eagerly from him, and, while tearing it open, bade him wait to take back an answer.

"Ther' haint no answer," the boy replied, swinging himself down the railing of the steps.

"Here then, take this," he called after him, holding out a small coin.

The boy looked back, and eyed it longingly, but hesitated.

"She paid me," he said.

"Nonsense! take it," said Arthur, flinging it after him, and turning back into the house.

Even this insignificant circumstance had power to disturb him, indicating as it did a native independence and decision of character he had learned to dread before, and which now made him, in spite

of his anxiety to know its contents, draw the letter slowly from its envelope, and pause a moment before reading it. It ran as follows : —

DEAR ARTHUR : —

I do not write to reproach you, nor to describe the effect of your communication of yesterday on my own feeling. What that feeling is, and the belief on which it rests, you know already ; while I must admit, I suppose, that, unsound and dangerous as these new beliefs of yours seem, they are honestly held, as you say. Our duty to each other becomes all the more plain and imperative then. We must part. I will not say that all my old affection for you is destroyed, for that would not be true ; but more clearly than ever I see that love is not the only essential of married happiness. How can a woman promise a wife's honor and obedience to one whom she believes pledged to the support of the worst principles? So firmly do I hold to the faith which I have been taught, and to the belief that your rejection of that faith can lead only to the greatest loss and error, that I would suffer any sacrifice rather than seem to sanction such an error in any way. Do not try to change this decision. It will be quite useless, and only bring needless suffering to us both. It is best that we should not see each other again ; and to avoid that I shall leave home to-morrow. Oh, think, think what a dangerous path you are following ! Put aside these wicked, tempting thoughts, and pray for guidance back to the true way, — as I pray constantly. Then, perhaps, all may be well with us again.

RACHEL.

Arthur crushed the letter in his hand, and, seizing his hat, left the house at once. He was deeply

hurt and offended. Going to-morrow! — that was to-day, for the letter bore the date of the previous evening, and by the noon train, doubtless, which would leave in a few hours. What had he done to deserve such treatment as this? It was inexcusable. Not see him again! Did she think he would submit to a decree like that? He would compel her to see him, and force her to listen to him; cover her with reproaches; shame her out of her petty, senseless fears; and bear her away with him in face of her own opposition and the world's. Such were the hot thoughts that rushed through his brain, as he went rapidly down the street, and paused at her door. An unreasonable fancy possessed him that she would open it, and that he should be able to melt and overcome her at a glance. He was forced to collect himself when he saw her little niece inside the threshold, — a fair-haired child of eight years, — who stood leaning against the open door, smiling shyly up at him, and who seemed to understand his errand at once.

"Auntie isn't at home," she said, in a piping, childlike treble; "she's gone off a good ways in the cars, — I s'posed you knew. She's going to stay a long time, maybe. She's going to bring me and Benny something nice, if we're good."

While Arthur stood staring at her in dumb surprise, the child's mother stepped to the door, having heard Arthur's voice from within, and the little

one ran away. She bade him good-morning in a friendly tone, and asked him to come in. In dull amaze, and with a terrible sinking of the heart, he followed her into the little parlor, which, apparently, had not been occupied since his last visit; for he noticed, in a confused way, while his companion began talking, a few bits of cut paper scattered over the carpet near the window, at the same time catching sight of a small, shining object under a distant chair.

"Rachel went early this morning," he heard her sister say. "You did not know she was going?" in surprise, as Arthur turned his face full upon her. It was impossible to mistake its expression of profound astonishment, mingled with acute mortification. With a muttered exclamation he threw himself into a chair, and covered his face with his hands, while his companion regarded him with a perplexed and distressed countenance.

"Something has happened," she said at last. "Tell me what it is."

"Has she not told you?" he asked, looking up at her.

The other shook her head, but her face showed that she was not wholly ignorant of what had taken place.

"She is unjust and cruel!" he exclaimed, springing from his chair. "She is treating me badly!" His companion seated herself, her eyes following

him with a compassionate expression, as he moved excitedly about the room.

"You had some trouble last Monday?"

"Then she has told you?" Arthur said, pausing in front of her; but again she denied this, and he soon learned that she only guessed what had happened from her sister's manner, the evidences of broken rest and mental agitation on her part, a long secret conference she had held with her father, and her hurried departure that morning. If this reserve between the two sisters struck Arthur at all, it was only for the moment, so painfully engrossed was he with his own suffering. His indignation had now changed into a feeling of wounded pride and despair; and he would have turned and left the house, but that something in the friendly tones of the voice now addressing him, and the expression of sisterly interest in his companion's face tempted him to remain and open his heart freely.

Mrs. Meredith belonged to that mild, womanly type, with gentle looks and ways, and an air of soft, protective tenderness, which easily invites the confidence of the unhappy. The two sisters bore only a slight resemblance to each other; the older having a pale complexion with black hair brushed to a satin-like smoothness, dark melancholy eyes and drooping eyelids that heightened the natural pensiveness of her expression. She was dressed in some light summer goods, with a freshly

gathered rose in her belt and looked younger than she was.

She listened with a sympathetic face, over which a look of curious mystification flitted from time to time, as Arthur seated himself again and related what had taken place. There was silence in the room for several moments after he ceased speaking, broken at last by a faint troubled sigh.

"Rachel will feel this very deeply," she said at last, fixing her large, brooding gaze on the young man.

"But you do not think she is right in throwing me off like this?" he exclaimed, adding bitterly, as she made no reply, "One would think I was a public malefactor, and had committed some crime."

"That would be different," she said, casting down her eyes and smoothing an imaginary wrinkle in her dress. "Then you could repent and be forgiven."

"I have done nothing to repent of," was the quick reply. "A man doesn't repent of speaking his honest opinion."

She pondered over this a moment with the same downward look of reflection, her fingers still smoothing the imaginary wrinkle. "I suppose Rachel would say, its being an honest opinion doesn't make it a true one," she said at last, raising her eyes deprecatingly to his.

"But you — you do not believe that these new ideas are so terribly wicked?" leaning towards and catching some faint suggestion of hope in her manner.

"I?" she said, shrinking a little away from him with a timid look. "I know nothing about such matters; I do not understand these things you have been telling me about. I —" with a flickering smile, "I am a little afraid of them."

"Then you are like Ray," he replied, with another touch of bitterness; "she is afraid of them."

"Ah!" with a soft catching-in of her breath; "but she is not afraid of them in the same way."

Arthur did not seem to hear this, his thoughts having assumed their old troubled shape, while he rose and began to walk restlessly about the room, her eyes following him with the same compassionate look as before.

"What can I do?" she asked softly, as he caught this look.

"Help me," he said, in a despairing tone. "Make her see how horribly unjust she is."

She gently shook her head, not so much in denial of his entreaty as of the hope that lay behind it. She asked about his plans, and counselled him to go away and leave matters as they were for the present. There was little else he could do. He could not follow Miss Armstrong

to another State and force himself into her presence in the house where she had sought refuge from him. He had better not even write to her, Mrs. Meredith thought, but Arthur instantly rebelled against this idea, and she was obliged to give it up.

"Have you seen my father?" she asked, after a while.

Arthur frowned, and looked towards the door. At the same moment a limping footstep was heard outside, and, directly after, the deacon entered the room. He was tall and white-haired, with features held in an expression of conscious rectitude and self-esteem. He walked with a halting step, caused by rheumatism. His manner betokened a definite purpose in hand, and, before seating himself, he directed a significant glance towards his daughter, which she was quick to understand. Turning, she bade Arthur good-morning, bending another troubled look upon him, then slipping quietly from the room.

Arthur remained standing after the old man's entrance, hesitating whether to resume his seat or to make his excuses and go, when a slow-spoken, but imperative, "Please be seated, sir," left him no choice; and, with a constrained air, which revealed his inward vexation, he obeyed. Arthur Forbes had never liked his prospective father-in-law, and nothing but loyalty to his betrothed had

prevented the escape of this feeling before. Except for this relationship, and in his present state of mind, he would have yielded to the impulse to pronounce the deacon, who was held to be a model of Christian virtue among his neighbors, a vain and sanctimonious hypocrite; but he would have been mistaken there. It is always easy to impugn the sincerity of those who differ from us; and Arthur was in that period of reaction against the dominion of old ideas when all the former idols of our respect and admiration fall into temporary neglect and abuse.

It was the deacon's misfortune, rather than his fault, that all his walk and conversation seemed flavored with an unctuous piety. To the plain, unsophisticated minds of his townsmen his lofty method of discourse and prevailing solemnity of mien savored of the highest spiritual grace. He himself held his position as deacon to be second in responsibility only to the minister's, committing the entire moral guardianship of the community to his charge. The youthful offenders of the village dreaded nothing so much as to be caught in some of their mischievous pranks by the deacon, and held captive to an hour's moral discourse; while the habitual loafers of the town, sitting in idle content in front of some saloon or grocery, had learned to descry his slowly-moving figure in the distance, and to beat a precipitate retreat into

the nearest alley, where they remained until he passed by.

As Arthur sat before him, waiting for what he knew was to come, he was conscious of the same culprit-like feeling that he had experienced under similar circumstances when a boy, at the same time that he owned an irreverent desire to laugh. Underlying this was a sense of real injury at the thought that he had been purposely left in such a position by one from whom he had a right to expect the most thoughtful consideration.

Rachel Armstrong had always held her father in entire confidence and honor, knowing him to be constant in duty, a friend to the deserving, the minister's chief ally and adviser, and a man everywhere respected by the good and feared by the wicked. Nothing was more natural when this unexpected trouble came upon her than that she should turn to him for counsel, and seem disposed to rest its solution in his hands. He had received the news of Arthur's change of views with an angry displeasure that made her half repent the disclosure, forbidding her to see him again, and assuming entire control of the affair as if it were his own. She had never disobeyed her father, though she had both the conscience and the will to do so had she believed him to be in the wrong; but now her own wish coincided with his demand. She did not desire to see Arthur again

until she had had time to collect her thoughts and reflect on what he had told her.

The conversation which took place between Arthur and the deacon was of a solemn and upbraiding tone on the one hand, and somewhat too sharp and spirited on the other. Arthur was irritated afresh by every look and tone of his companion, and he expressed himself with an undisguised plainness of speech, set off by a few pointed sarcasms that bore their own witness to his defeat in the growing sternness and coldness of his adversary's manner. He heard himself compared to Belial and Saul of Tarsus, to Ahab and Pontius Pilate, to Nero and Tom Paine ; and was compelled to submit to the application of several texts of Scripture, culled chiefly from the imprecatory Psalms.

He rose to go with feelings of mingled defiance and despair raging in his heart, pausing to take a last look at the little room where he had spent the happiest hours of his life, and which it now seemed he should never enter again.

His eye fell once more upon that small, shining object under the chair which had caught his attention when he first entered the room, and, taking two or three steps forward, he stooped and deliberately picked it up, his companion watching him in frowning surprise. It was a thing of slight value, and carried more sad than hopeful memories

along with it; yet its possession gave Arthur a dreary comfort. It was the small silver thimble, which had fallen to the floor and rolled across the room when its owner rose to her feet and faced him in her first overwhelming sorrow and surprise.

There was one other person to whom Arthur felt obliged to explain the present juncture of his affairs, and that was his old friend and minister, Mr. Barnes.

Mr. Barnes had been the pastor of Arthur's parents, both Hester and himself having been born into the church from which he was about to withdraw. Hester had long since let her membership therein go by default, quietly renouncing the religious doctrines in which she had been brought up, along with other traditional beliefs which seemed to restrict her individual will and conscience. She took comparatively little interest in any kind of religious controversy, holding most of the questions with which it deals as subjects of useless intellectual speculation, equally remote from the practical needs of life. Arthur had, on the contrary, shown a deep religious sensibility from childhood, which had grown with his years. Some of his most precious recollections were clustered about the memory of his mother, and the lessons he had learned at her knee, the hymns and bedtime prayer she had taught him. It spoke much for the generous and upright nature of the sister

that she had, from the beginning of her charge over her brother, recognized this mental difference between them, and, as has been said, left him free to follow his own purposes in life, unhindered by any differing word or conviction of hers.

Arthur had always been a favorite with his old pastor, who had named his little son for him, and who had watched and helped to guide his course from early youth. With that sad necessity which compels the old to shift the burden of their unfinished work upon the young, Mr. Barnes looked forward to see Arthur, with his excellent talents and the advantages which had fallen to him, accomplish much that he had failed to perform. He was a man of gentle presence, scholarly habits, and a thoughtful but rather sad countenance, who had lived a pinched life on the salary of a country clergyman, stretched to provide for the wants of an increasing family, with little other compensation than the high thoughts gathered from his books, the lettered divines whose dingy but friendly covers looked out from his library shelves. The knowledge that he was trying to do a little good also comforted him at times; but Mr. Barnes held his own gifts in poor regard, and never did himself justice in the estimate he placed on his work and influence in the community where he lived. The distrust with which we regard ourselves is apt to be reflected in the opinions of our neighbors;

and, though the nobility of the minister's character had gained for him the tender affection of those who knew him best, he was conscious of losing ground in the esteem of others, who like to see their choices in the personal relations of life justified by the signs of outward success. Mr. Barnes was, in truth, fitted to occupy a more honorable and lucrative post than that at Dennison. He was a man of wide learning and thoughtful views; but his disposition, always timid and retiring, had grown into one of confirmed self-distrust, and the little ambition he had once cherished had died out.

He greeted Arthur with a smile and a warm pressure of the hand. His little boy was in the study, and stopped his play to come and stand at the visitor's chair, looking gravely up at him, as if to question his errand. He was a delicate child, with that expression of refined spirituality about the blue-veined temples which hints of early death. His steady look troubled Arthur, and, to avoid it, and cover the embarrassment he felt in his pastor's presence, he lifted the boy to his knee, and spoke a few words to him. The minister looked on smiling. "He is named for you, you know."

Arthur dropped his eyes. "I trust you will never regret it."

"We are not afraid of that, are we, Arthur?"

"I hope you will say the same after you have heard what I have come to tell you."

The minister looked at him more attentively. He noticed, for the first time, the worn and anxious look on his young friend's face, and saw in the troubled gaze, now lifted to him, that he was in some mental disturbance. He spoke to his little boy, and the child slipped down from Arthur's knee and left the room.

"You have something to say to me," he said, when they were alone.

With hardly a word of preface, Arthur spoke and told his story. The minister listened quietly, with no sign to betray the pained surprise he felt, except that his head sank despondently on the hand supported by his elbow on the desk before him. The first revelation over, Arthur tried to explain and justify himself, but he soon stopped. There was more that might be said, but he had told all that was necessary. His listener drew a long, heavy sigh. "So then, my boy," he said sadly, "I have lost you." The tone of regretful affection in which this was spoken, unaccompanied by a word of reproach, touched Arthur deeply.

"Ah, sir," he cried with emotion, "I hope you know how it pains me to have to disappoint you."

"Well, well," in a tone that seemed to bespeak Arthur's patience with himself as well as his own; "the young are apt to disappoint us.

This is Dr. Nathan's work, I suppose," in the same discouraged manner. "You are not the only one that owes his first lapse from faith to him." Dr. Nathan was one of the leading professors at the university where Arthur had studied, whose liberal views had given much offence to his clerical brethren.

'I cannot agree to that," Arthur replied respectfully, but firmly. "No professor is better loved by the students than Dr. Nathan."

"Our tempters often appear our benefactors," the other made answer, more bitterly than he had yet spoken.

"But I cannot think of Dr. Nathan as a tempter," Arthur replied, earnestly. "It was he who first warned me."

"How did he warn you?" the other asked.

"He told me I had better not begin to read and question unless I was certain I wanted to keep it up."

The minister passed his hand over his face, perhaps to hide the expression that flitted across it.

"That is something, to be sure; but you had made up your mind to 'keep it up'? It is always so. We think we have only one desire, to carefully examine every new theory or belief that is set before us, when the truth is that we are born into these beliefs much more than we reason ourselves into them."

The minister did not seem aware that this principle could be made to bear as damaging testimony against himself as against anybody else. Arthur contented himself with replying that he was certainly not born into his present beliefs.

"Don't call them beliefs yet. Wait until you have tested them, and the newness has worn off."

Arthur, without taking offence at this, said he was willing to do that, and for that reason had decided not to begin preaching just yet, but to go abroad for a year.

His companion reflected a space, drawing his hand in a troubled way over his face. His real preference was, though he was not proud of the wish he found rising in his heart, that Arthur should begin preaching right away, now, while these new theories sat fresh upon him in all their crudeness. Nothing, he believed, would so surely rob them of every illusion of power and beauty as the attempt at pulpit presentation. A sensitive soul like Arthur's would soon feel that; and yet, as the minister looked at him, he did not feel so sure of it. There are natures that carry their own power along with them to grace and idealize existence, however they choose to lead it. He sighed again.

"I know you are disappointed in me," Arthur repeated. "I hope you do not think me rash and conceited. If there is anything you can say to

me, any new light you can give me, I will gladly profit by it. I only wish to know the truth."

The minister turned his eyes away, that the other might not see the sudden look of admiration he felt gleam in them.

"No, no, my boy, I shan't argue with you. You are past the reach of argument, though you don't think so, of course. You think it is only the last argument you have heard that you are standing on now. Ah, you young men, — with your arguments and doubts! One would think no one had ever had a doubt before until you came along to seize and claim it. 'Honest doubts,' you call them, and think them very fine."

Arthur's thought was that he did not consider such doubts so fine, save in respect to the dishonest beliefs they served to contrast; but he only said that he prized his own doubts only as he was able to see that they led to a "higher faith."

"Ah, you think so," said the minister. "Nothing that I could say would convince you, I suppose, that this 'higher faith,' as you call it, is only a part of your old habit of believing. Don't talk to me about faith springing from doubt," with a little impatience. "As well say that truth is born of falsehood, and evil is the product of goodness."

Though this was, in a dim, unsettled way, a part of the very philosophy Arthur had come to accept,

he made no attempt to defend it. The minister had risen from his chair, and stood by his desk, restlessly moving about the books and papers on it. He had spoken in a high, nervous key, that indicated rising irritation. Arthur saw that he did not mean to talk further with him, and felt that he wished him to go.

"You give me up then," he said, rather mournfully, as he rose and stood before him.

"No, my boy; no," the other said, more gently, laying his hand on his shoulder. "I shall never give you up; but there are better ways of remembering you, than trying to measure dialectic swords." He paused, and looked sadly at him. "I shall remember you in my prayers."

There was nothing to be said in reply to this, and Arthur could only go away. For some reason, which he did not try to explain, he felt more sorry for his old pastor than he did for himself. The minister was aware of this, and the feeling added a little more to that weight of self-discontent which bore so heavily on him.

CHAPTER VI.

AN INTELLECTUAL TEA-PARTY.

THOUGH the professed objects of Miss Fairfax's visit to Dennison were rest and leisure, Hester was right in judging that some social recognition of her advent would not be taken amiss, and had decided upon a small tea-party. Tom Fletcher arrived the day before; and, when he learned of Arthur's trouble, began to exert himself, with that mixture of good feeling and lively intellect which he possessed, to shield his friend from annoyance and unnecessary care, taking upon himself the latter's share in the preparations for their coming trip to the woods, and making himself generally useful and agreeable.

He and Virginia fell into a relation of friendly comradeship at once, keeping up a merry cross-fire of jest and argument, interspersed with just the right number and kind of gallantries on his part to serve as mental stimulus on hers.

Virginia's figure was naturally the most conspicuous in the little company that began to assemble at the appointed hour. This was without intention on her part, however. It certainly

was not her fault that she was taller than any other woman present, nor that the feminine apparel of Dennison was constructed after a pattern so far behind that of her city dress-maker at home. The muslin dress which she wore was a simple affair, though it presented an unusual blending of tints to the Dennison eye; broad stripes of saffron on a ground of pale-brown, which only one of Virginia's daring instincts would have selected; while something in the negligent droop of the yellow roses in her breast and the careless arrangement of her hair completed the impression of pleasing grace and audacity which she created.

The latest guest to arrive was a large, blonde young man, dressed in the costume of the English clergy, with a clear eye that looked calmly about the room, a strong chin and broad chest; altogether a good example of that muscular Christianity so much praised now-a-days. This was Rev. Chase Howard, the new Episcopal minister, who had lately accepted a call to the parish of St. Andrews, in Dennison. The people of the church had not been quite certain he would suit them; but their small numbers, and the obscure position which they held among the other sects of the village, gave them little choice. While they were still discussing his merits the new pastor had gone to work in a hearty, masterful way that promised to conquer all opposition. Some new

features had been introduced in the service, which attracted the young people, but disconcerted some of their elders, and won the young clergyman the reputation of being "high church," — a charge he met with perfect composure and an amused smile. The members of the vestry paid slight attention to these rumors, and were little inclined to dispute the rule of one who had so good a knowledge of the practical details of his profession, understood how to keep the church treasury supplied, and contented himself with a small salary.

Besides the changes in the service, Howard had started one or two other movements which promised to reflect much credit on himself and the church; organizing a literary union among the young people, and a new charitable society which invited the coöperation of the other sects and the general public. It was in connection with this last work that he met Hester Forbes, always active in labors of this kind, in which she proved his most useful ally.

Chase Howard stood two or three inches above every other man in the room, as Virginia did above the women, and each had directed more than one curious glance towards the other, across the intervening heads of the company, before an introduction took place.

Virginia was conversing, in her liveliest manner, with Tom Fletcher, when Arthur brought up the

new guest for presentation. She had expressed great incredulity over the amount of profit and entertainment he and Arthur expected to reap in their camping expedition with no one but themselves for company.

"What is it that men see in each other to care for, anyway?" she asked, in a disparaging tone.

Tom was much amused at this. "Well it is only a kind of exoteric knowledge I could give you on that subject, you know."

Virginia sighed, and said she supposed so. He went on to give her a prospective account of their life in the woods.

"I shall fish, and try to bag a few rabbits and birds," he said; "but Arthur will not. He has scruples against it, you know."

"Has he?" Virginia asked with animation. "I think the more of him for such scruples."

"That is rather hard on me," said Tom. She smiled, but made no attempt to console him. "The time will come," she began, in a serious tone that bordered on the oracular, "when the present pursuits of hunting and fishing will be considered as barbarous as"— She paused for a strong enough comparison.

"As bull-fighting in Spain," Tom finished, with an impartial air. "That is what Arthur says; but my comfort is that neither is considered quite as bad as that now. "I'm not going to catch any fish

for the people who are to live a generation or two to come. I couldn't think of disturbing their consciences in that way. We shall cook them for supper. Perhaps you don't know that I am a capital cook."

"Oh, if you are going to eat them!" she murmured, relentingly. "Do you and your friend disagree on other subjects as — as vital as this? You needn't laugh — I consider it a vital question."

"To the fish and rabbits, undoubtedly," he replied, and received a withering look for his levity. "Arthur and I are too good friends to care about small differences of opinion. We disagree just enough to make acquaintance appetizing."

Virginia said that she could understand that; she liked people best herself who disagreed sometimes.

"I should think it would be hard for you to find any," he said insinuatingly. She seemed not to understand.

"Any who would disagree with you, I mean." Her face took on an impassive expression.

"That is very pretty," she said at length; "but you ought to understand that the modern woman does not approve of compliments."

"But you see I keep forgetting that you are a modern woman."

She looked a little flattered at this, and then a little piqued, while he watched her with an amused

face. "There now, see how unreasonable you are; you don't take that as a compliment, and yet you are displeased with me. Here comes Arthur, with Chase Howard. Am I to give up my place?"

Without waiting for a reply he rose, and the three gentlemen stood grouped about Virginia.

"Miss Fairfax has just asked me if you and I agree in most of our opinions," Tom said to his friend. "She doesn't approve of mine." Arthur's face reddened, and, making no reply, he turned, and left the group.

Arthur Forbes had one of those sensitive and rather exacting natures which can never be at ease in what is termed society. He had no skill in the use of those light jests and epigrams with which his friend Tom was so ready, and which constitute the basis of drawing-room conversation. He had, moreover, another reason for taking offence at Tom's words. The suspicion had quickly darted through his mind that Virginia had been making him and his private affairs a subject of comment. Something in her manner, a strong effort on her part to appear unconscious, had led him to perceive that his sister had told her what had occurred; and he fancied all the people in the room were talking about him, or busy with silent conjectures, wondering why Rachel Armstrong was not present. The evening seemed interminable to him,

and he drew a long breath of relief when the last guest had departed.

Chase Howard seated himself in Fletcher's place with a slow, comfortable movement, indicating that he meant to stay. His large proportions filled the chair completely; and, as he leaned his broad shoulders against the back of crimson terry, letting his hands hang negligently over the arms, and turning his massive head slowly towards her, he reminded Virginia of one of Canova's lions, peaceful and quiescent, but capable of making a swift, unexpected spring. Though she preserved an air of smiling composure, she was conscious of a little internal flutter, opening and shutting her gold-colored fan, not awkwardly like a school-girl, but in the gracefully defensive manner in which a woman of the world knows how to use that potent weapon of her sex.

"How big he is!" was her first thought; "and conceited too, I dare say." Her first feeling of timidity abating, the wish was arising to pierce and punish the man's complacency, as she chose to call it; to take him off his guard, and to say something that would displease and perhaps shock him.

She was like the gamester who, though conscious that he has a dangerous adversary, believes that he holds the winning card, and is tormented with the desire to show his hand at once.

"So you think it important what opinions people hold," Howard said, after a few remarks had been exchanged between them.

"Certainly," said Virginia; "do not you? I am sure I have very decided opinions myself." This in the manner of a preliminary challenge, shutting her fan and laying it down with a definitive air.

Her companion allowed his eyes to wander over her, not in any curiosity inspired by her last remark, but in pleasant contemplation of an agreeable object. He was thinking that Miss Fairfax was by far the best-looking woman in the room, — the best-dressed too. She reminded him of the young women he used to meet in his mother's drawing-room in the city. The careless ease and grace of her bearing formed a pleasant contrast with the strained politeness of the rest of the company, who, though they knew each other intimately as friends and neighbors, wore that air of distant acquaintance which usually prevails in the social gatherings of small towns. Howard owned to himself that the change was as agreeable as it was unexpected. He never wearied of his work; but the dull routine of village life depressed him at times, and he was conscious of living a rather starved life on the artistic and beauty-loving side of his nature. Women were made, he thought, to preserve the æsthetic ends of existence. The strong-minded woman, devoted to the masculine

objects of business and reform, he held in strong theoretic dislike, though he had never really met one of that class, unless, as he suspected, Hester Forbes was one.

"In a general way, yes," he said, in reply to Virginia's question. "I suppose it is of some importance what opinions people hold; but it is more important to know the things they do."

"But one must think right in order to act right," Virginia replied in an assured tone. He smiled indulgently.

"The world would have progressed much more slowly than it has if that were true," he said. "People act from habit and custom, the accepted standards of the age, not from individual conviction."

"That did very well for the dark ages," Virginia answered; "but we are changing all that now." He did not seem to notice the pronoun. They were serving refreshments, and some one had placed a small stand, with cups and plates for two, before them; and, during the conversation that followed, Virginia took covert satisfaction in noting the quiet, unobtrusive manner in which all her wants were met, Howard acquitting himself in these small duties with an easy and practised air, that showed his city training.

"He has the manners of a prince," was her silent comment.

"The historians are finding it rather difficult to define the dark ages, you know. Do you take sugar in your tea?" taking a small cube of cut-loaf from the bowl with the old-fashioned tongs, and dropping it into her cup. "No, it matters very little what the majority think on this or that subject. Half the things people talk about, and feel bound to express an opinion upon, are mere abstractions, anyway."

"Whom do you mean by the majority?" Virginia demanded.

He laughed, and admitted the question was an embarrassing one to settle.

"I suppose you include women?" He turned a puzzled look on her. "I mean among those whose opinions are not of the least account." She fastened a pair of large, expressive eyes on him, which he allowed to remain there a moment before summoning his thoughts to reply, a smile slowly rising and spreading over his features.

"Oh, no; I shouldn't say that exactly!" turning his attention to his plate.

"That is very encouraging." He laughed again, and began to stir his tea. "Women's opinions are"— She turned quickly towards him, and once more he found himself under the spell of that large, liquid gaze. "Oh, well," he ended with a good-humored smile of defeat, "I suppose I care as much about women's opinions as they do themselves!"

At that moment Hester Forbes crossed the room, carrying a light tray, and Virginia's eyes rested reflectively upon her.

"Do you mean to say that a woman like my friend Hester cares little for her opinions?" Howard's eyes followed hers.

"Miss Forbes is an exception."

"Ah, that is the way with you men!" she cried, with some natural resentment. "You are always finding exceptions. But you are mistaken; I can assure you there are many women like her." Her earnestness attracted his attention, and he looked inquiringly at her.

"You are not one of them?" he said, in a tone that half affirmed, half questioned his own statement.

"I," exclaimed Virginia, with proud humility; "I am not half as good; I am not her equal, only her disciple."

"Disciple?" he repeated, with uplifted eyebrows. "Does Miss Forbes have disciples?"

"Any number," was the prompt reply. "It was through her pamphlet on 'The National Error' that I first knew about her. Then I heard her speak, and we have been fast friends ever since."

Virginia enjoyed the perplexed look which was now fixed upon her, finishing her tea and the last of her chicken sandwich with deliberate relish.

"So Miss Forbes has written a pamphlet?" Howard said at last, recovering himself.

"Didn't you know it?"

He shook his head.

"Then excuse me," she said, with dignity, "but to know Hester Forbes and not to have read 'The National Error' is not to know her at all."

"Perhaps so," he said with a resigned air; "but I know she has some excellent ideas about nursing. 'The National Error,'" he repeated in a musing tone. "Repudiation, I suppose?"

Virginia bent her eyes pityingly upon him. "It is plain one would have to begin at the beginning with you."

He gave one of his self-indulgent laughs; then went on to explain, in more serious vein, that a busy clergyman like himself had very little time for anything outside the line of his particular work. He was ashamed to confess how little reading he did through the year.

"Yes," she replied, looking thoughtfully at him. "Mr. Fletcher said you were a clergyman." A demure expression crept into her eyes. "Are you a Reformed Episcopalian?" she asked.

He paused in the act of raising the first spoonful of frozen cream from the saucer just placed before him, and turned an uncomprehending look towards her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, as if he had not

heard aright. Virginia repeated her question, not without a little inward quaking.

"Decidedly no," was the answer, quite prompt and conclusive.

"Oh, I didn't know!" defensively. "I knew they sometimes did reform."

He smiled in frank enjoyment of this thrust; and Virginia, at her ease once more, began asking a number of questions on the religious topics of the day, and his particular relation to them; drawing out his opinions and soliciting his judgment. He made brief and evasive replies at first, not wishing to abuse the occasion, and a little distrustful of his interlocutor; but these fears soon vanished, and he plunged into the heart of his subject, talking on in an earnest and eloquent vein for more than an hour. The discovery developed in the course of the conversation that Howard was from the same city as his companion, where his mother and sisters still lived, — his father was the late lamented rector of St. Mark's, — added another interest to this new acquaintance. Tom Fletcher, glancing across the room, noted their absorption, and smiled; while Howard, roused by the departure of some of the guests, looked at his watch, and rose hurriedly to his feet.

"I have an engagement at eight," he said, "and it is half-past. I've been preaching at a great rate," drawing himself to his full height, and look-

ing down at Virginia, who had also risen. "I don't know whether to apologize or not." She assured him that no apology was needed; she had been very much interested. That was true. Virginia was interested in everything, and would have listened with the same attention to the discourse of an intelligent Buddhist provided he had the right kind of manners, and knew how to use his fork. On the latter point the Buddhist might have been uncertain; which was where Howard had the advantage.

"Then, if you are interested, perhaps you will let me call and bring the book of which I was speaking."

A slight color tinged her cheek, but she gave a ready consent, and he bowed and left her. He then made his way to his hostess, with whom he exchanged a brief adieu, and took his departure.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE WOODS.

THE next day was Sunday, and Virginia came downstairs an hour after breakfast, dressed for church. The two young men had gone out, and Hester was sitting alone in the library.

"I am going to hear Mr. Howard preach," said Virginia, as she stood in the door-way, flushing a little as she made this announcement, but looking her friend courageously in the eye, and with a slight touch of bravado.

Hester did not try to conceal her surprise. She had supposed that Virginia and she were to spend the morning reading together, and the volume of Lecky lay on the table near by, with a mark at the place where they had left off the day before.

"We had a long talk last evening," Virginia explained, transferring her look to a refractory button on her glove. "I found him quite entertaining; his views are so very original. I have always been interested in the Anglican movement."

"Does Mr. Howard represent the Anglican movement?"

"I don't know about that. He certainly seems

very well informed. You — you do not seem to like him, Hester?"

"I have nothing against him," the latter answered. "He seems intelligent, and is certainly very energetic. He does a great deal of good among the poor. Of course I do not agree with his theological opinions."

"Oh, dear, no!" Virginia made haste to assent. "Well, I must go now," as she finished buttoning her glove. She moved a step nearer her friend. "You — you don't think it strange, my going? I always do go to church somewhere, you know."

Hester smiled. "Go, by all means, if you wish. I hope you do not think I consider it wrong to go to church. I don't know," she added, a moment after; "I suppose some of us ought to offer to go with you; but Arthur is out, and" —

"No, indeed," exclaimed Virginia, "I prefer to go alone;" and, bending over, with one of her quick, impulsive movements, she kissed her friend on the cheek, and rustled out of the room.

"How sensible Hester is!" she said to herself, as she went down the street. "Some women would have been sure to tease and make a fuss, but Hester is too dignified. Not that there is anything to tease about," she added, with a self-corrective pinch.

Hester inwardly owned to a slight sense of disappointment. Not that she cared so much about

the reading, — the chapter on Witchcraft could wait another day, — but she found herself failing in sympathy, as she had before, with what she regarded the too versatile character of her friend's interests. This discontent sometimes took the form of reproach against herself, and sometimes against Virginia. This morning it savored a little of both; and, while she condemned her friend for that lightness of temperament manifest in this new passing interest in the Anglican movement, whatever that might be, she half envied the fresh and youthful feeling with which Virginia set out on her undertaking. Comparing herself with Virginia, she recognized that, for her, the day of enthusiasm had passed. Her convictions were as strong as ever; but the first glowing faith in their rapid fulfilment had disappeared. Yet she worked on, sustained not by the promise of results, but by an inward assurance of right, and, let it be admitted, by the bond of habit. She had worked so long to bring about certain ends of social justice and reform, that to abandon them now would be to empty life of every motive to usefulness. This bond of habit is one of our greatest moral safeguards. Youth's first enthusiasm and impulse to action gone by, it remains to bind us to the fulfilment of the duties and obligations we so ardently, but ignorantly, assumed in the past.

Hester Forbes's loneliness had become habitual;

and, having long since learned not to look in other women for the same degree of interest in the ideas which engrossed her, a feeling of charitable excuse soon replaced that of disappointment in her friend, and, taking advantage of the quiet in the house, she busied herself in writing letters until noon.

When Virginia returned from church she tried to defend her peculiar action by declaring herself disappointed in the sermon. There had been nothing in the morning's discourse about modern episcopacy, which was taken up instead with a rather dry discussion of the nature of the sacraments. Still, Virginia admitted that the service had always pleased her. There was a new society just organized in the city where she lived, which held public meetings every Sunday morning, but without any religious services, the exercises consisting only of a lecture on some moral or useful topic. She didn't think she should like that, though many of the best people belonged. What did Hester think of it?

Arthur Forbes and Tom Fletcher set out for the woods Monday morning, but, before he left home, Arthur wrote the following letter: —

My dear Rachel: —

Did you think I would submit for one moment to the cruel and unjust decision laid down in your letter? You know me better than that; but I will do as you seem to

wish, leave you wholly to yourself for the present, confident that your true heart will lead you to take back all you have said, and bring us together again. Have we known and loved each other all these years to give each other up now? I will never give you up. We belong to each other.

ARTHUR.

The life of the young men in camp followed closely the description given by Tom to Virginia. The former spent a large part of each day in exercise with his rod and gun, neither of which yielded him very flattering results, though this did not seem to disturb that condition of placid content and expectation which marks the amateur sportsman.

Arthur spent his time in lounging idly about the camp, varying its monotony by an occasional long tramp in the woods, reading, and botanizing a little, but giving himself up, for the most part, to long hours of painful revery and conjecture of what was to come. Though he never thought of relinquishing his main purpose, all his immediate hopes and plans were held in check by the pressing doubts and anxieties which crowded round the thoughts of Rachel Armstrong.

His mind wavered continually between the three states of blame, pity, and admiration; for, while he condemned the narrow and timorous judgment which threatened to part him from her, he praised and even exulted in the high, resolute purpose which governed this and all her actions. There

was something more than a romantic fondness and happy lover's faith between these two, their love for each other having something elemental in it, essential to the nature of both; and, though their present relation might be destroyed, such a circumstance could not alter the soul-likeness between them, nor uproot that sense of a single, though divided, self-hood which had become part of their permanent consciousness. Their wills and consciences had met in sharp opposition for the first time; but, whatever the result might be, it would leave no feeling of selfish victory on either side; rather that sense of suffering and loss which arises when necessity compels us to inflict some injury on ourselves.

Tom Fletcher understood the condition of his friend's mind better than he pretended, deeming it more fantastical than sound, and endeavoring here, as elsewhere, to draw Arthur back from the unreal dreams and fancies with which he invested the world and the action of the people in it, to his own more practical basis of observation. Tom's affection for his friend, and his pride and confidence in him, were covered with a mask of good-natured banter; a disguise readily pierced by Arthur, who was content not to disturb the pleasure his friend had in wearing it. Being men, they were willing to take assurance of each other's sincerity of feeling in the knowledge each

had gained of the other's character through years of intimate friendship, beginning with their life at college. They lived together in camp in amiable independence of each other's ways, and a generous companionship that left each free to pursue his own mood, making no demands upon the services or good-will of either.

They had many conversations together concerning Arthur's plans and prospects; and, though the latter was apt to meet only chaffing opposition when these topics were broached, he never doubted his friend's sympathy. Tom was no idealist, but he was glad that Arthur was. He was, however, something quite as good, and as necessary to the world's use, an admirable specimen of clean, intelligent, active young manhood, and Arthur drew constantly from his friend's fund of vital strength and healthy, overflowing spirits; while Tom, as he expressed it, kept up his faith in the immortals by his acquaintance with Arthur. One afternoon they were lying on the bank of the small stream near which they had pitched their tent, when the conversation included some reference to Virginia Fairfax, for whom Tom feigned an incipient admiration, while Arthur gave voice to the same feeling of dislike he had expressed to his sister, saying that he could never understand why the latter cared for Virginia.

"That's easily explained. Miss Fairfax admires your sister, and Miss Forbes naturally admires herself somewhat — Oh, no offence is meant!" Tom interrupted himself, as the other looked a little displeased; "we all do and should, — within reasonable bounds, of course. Such admiration is what somebody has called the necessary 'gum of consistency' in all character. Then they have other beliefs in common, beliefs that Miss Forbes is in grim earnest about, and would go to the stake for, and which Miss Fairfax honestly believes that she believes. But you are prejudiced," he ended, as Arthur seemed still unconvinced, and was plainly tired of the subject. "The opinions of an engaged man, on such a subject, are forsworn, any way." He spoke thoughtlessly, and in momentary forgetfulness of the present condition of affairs, while his companion's face took on the look of painful uncertainty it wore so often of late.

"I begin to doubt if I am an engaged man," Arthur said, after a moment's pause.

"Pshaw, my boy, cheer up! She can't be so bad as that."

"You don't know her," Arthur said, in earnest protest. "You don't know what a power of self-sacrifice she has in any question of right and wrong; and in this matter she can only think me guilty of the worst wickedness."

Tom thought this reflected somewhat on the

young lady's intelligence, though he did not say so. "Queer," he began, in a reflective tone, "the intense, unreasoning way in which women hold to their opinions on some subjects; a man would almost prefer that they had none. Really, the most trying as well as interesting thing about a woman is her degree of limitation."

"I don't know about that," Arthur replied defensively. "There are plenty of women without opinions, for those who want that kind." The effect of his sister's teachings on certain subjects had never left him, and his sensitiveness was also touched by the fact that these general observations seemed to bear a marked application to a particular case. "Women are not perfect, of course," he added, in rather feeble conclusion.

"No, they are not perfect," the other replied, with philosophic resignment. "The perfect woman, somebody has said, is an ideal abstraction, compounded of the particular virtues and attractions of the different women of your acquaintance. That philosopher was more than half right who said no man could be wholly married to one woman; she is sure to fail him in some point, and he must seek the missing quality somewhere else."

"That's a pernicious doctrine," said Arthur, indignantly.

"It was one of your own liberal thinkers who said it, any way."

"I don't care if it was."

Tom laughed and lit his cigar, then withdrew a few feet from his companion, who had as sensitive a dislike for tobacco-smoke as some women.

"What a strange compound of rationalism and superstition you are!" he said, after a few preliminary puffs. "Here you are, striking out for the utmost liberty of thought and speech, yet you expect to hold men to the same old rules of a rigid, Puritan morality. Yours is the most original system I know. You ought to write it out."

"There are enough systems written out already. All the system I have is that a man may use his brains, and yet lead a decent, self-respecting life. If he can't, more's the pity."

"It sounds well, and I fully agree with the last part, — that it's a pity he can't."

"He can," said Arthur, stoutly, ignoring this wilful perversion.

"Oh, well, *don't*, then! Come, now, do you mean to say that these new sentiments you profess about the immutability of the human reason, and all that, could be safely trusted to the masses? I don't say they'll do any harm to the cultured few. They are bound, in a hundred ways, by habit, and the responsibility of their position, to do the respectable thing, any way; but it's different with the majority. Take away the element

of faith there, and you undermine the whole social fabric. Look at Russia!"

"I've heard of Russia, before," the other said, quietly. "That argument about the needs of the majority is as old as the hills."

"I never could understand why it was so much against the hills their being old."

"When I begin preaching a religion that has one standard for the 'cultured few,'" Arthur went on, unheeding this flippancy, "and another for the 'masses,' as you call them, strike me off the list of your respectable acquaintance. Who are we to talk about the masses, or to settle the amount of truth they require? It's neither your business, nor mine."

"Why, then, are you going to preach?" his friend calmly inquired.

"When I say it is not our business, I mean that we have no right to interfere with any other person's wish to study and determine these questions for himself. In another sense all my neighbor's thoughts and actions are my business — in so far as I can approach and rightly influence him. I am my brother's keeper. I am going to preach, because the pulpit has become one of the confirmed needs of the race" —

"That's the reason that about one-sixth of the population go to church, I suppose," Tom put in.

"And because I should be miserable if I couldn't.

I have as much right to preach, now, as if I still believed in miracles and eternal punishment."

"Preach away, my boy; but you'll find it up-hill work. In the first place, no one will come to hear you except those who know what you are going to say beforehand, and whom it doesn't in the least help or hinder to hear you repeat it; and, in the second place, if the really sinful and suffering did come, it would only be dry husks you could give them. What has modern liberalism to say to a lost soul, compared with the message Christianity has to offer? The trouble with you is that you don't know anything."

Arthur looked up in some offence.

"I mean it quite literally. The word 'know' is connected, in the root, with the word 'can.' Did you ever think of that? The man who knows is the man who can act, who can do something. The old religion rested on a basis of absolute belief, as good as knowledge. What does the rational philosophy of to-day rest on? A mere hope and implication, a few thin, intellectual speculations. What can such a creed do for a man sunk in the dregs of sin? Talk to him about the relativity of knowledge! I saw a play, once; it was about a girl who had sold her womanhood, and then repented, and tried hard to lead an honest life. She managed to do it, somehow, but nobody gave her any thanks for it. She 'couldn't get back,' she

said; that was her constant cry, — to 'get back.' Christianity shows men how to get back. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest shows them how they can't."

"There are, doubtless, a good many people who would prefer a doctrine of the survival of the unfittest," said Arthur, in an undisturbed tone.

"That's all very well; but what a man wants in religion is something to comfort him in affliction, and to give him a motive for right-doing. I am a liberal myself, if disbelief in the old doctrines makes one a liberal" —

"It doesn't," Arthur interrupted, with emphasis.

"But I impose the penalties of my belief on no one else. Strong meat for men, but milk for babes; and we all know that the majority of people, theologically speaking, are still in their swaddling-clothes. No; you will never save anybody, with these views of yours, except those who don't need saving. There's no cure in rationalism for the real sinner."

"Very well, then," said Arthur, "I will preach the gospel of prevention; and we have the authority of the proverb, for knowing that to be worth a good deal more. It's enough credit to science that she has learned how to point the moral of a bad example."

"My poor boy, have you come to that already?" and Tom threw away his cigar, and rose to his feet. The afternoon was waning; and, turning towards the tent, he put his fishing-tackle in order, and then set off in the boat, to catch a trout for supper.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LOVER'S DIALOGUE.

THE summer had reached its height when Arthur returned to town. It was one of those days which seem to stand midway between the two seasons, when Nature, with her finger on her lip, hushes the world into waiting silence while the period of ripe fulfilment passes noiselessly by and that of decay sets in.

The air was full of warm and mellow sunshine, tempered with a mild melancholy, and hints of the departing summer were noted in the hazy outline of the distant horizon and the shrill, plaintive chirp of the grasshopper. Occasionally a scarlet or yellow leaf loosened itself from the branch above and floated silently to the earth, adding a new weight to Arthur's depressed spirits as he walked slowly down the street. The spirit of the landscape had taken possession of him ; and, though he was impatient to reach his destination, his footsteps insensibly lagged, and it was with feelings of mingled dread and longing that he approached the house where he had formerly been the most welcome visitor.

When Rachel Armstrong returned home she

had but little difficulty in obtaining her father's consent to see Arthur once more, partly because he did not care to run the risk of being openly disobeyed had he refused consent, as something in her manner hinted he might, and partly because he had little fear of the result. In spite of the authority and consequence with which the deacon sought to invest all his actions, he was a man whose will was often overborne by a stronger one. In his case, as in most others, the desire to impose his own wish and opinion upon others was fostered as much by the cowardly instincts of those he came in contact with as by a native disposition to tyrannize. At least his youngest daughter, who preserved the most filial attitude towards him, had never yet felt herself in unpleasant subjection to him, nor failed, when some important step was to be taken, to rely chiefly on her own judgment. We are apt to imagine that we are wholly obedient to the authority which never exacts a disagreeable sacrifice, and runs along with our own wish and intention, as we are apt, also, to pride ourselves on the degree of influence we possess over those who own the same native tastes and inclinations as ourselves.

Moving restlessly about the room, awaiting Arthur's arrival, Rachel paused a few moments before the large engraving which hung above the sofa.

The subject had always been a favorite one with her, the figure of Beatrice symbolizing, to her pious imagination, the true relation of woman to man, the office of high spiritual trust and guardianship, which the one, if true to her nature, must always hold towards the other. She had, as has been said, small sympathy with those demands for the larger rights and opportunities of her sex which Hester Forbes was devoting her life to secure. It seemed to her that women wickedly failed to employ that chance to rescue and redeem the world, already bestowed in their natural endowment; and that, not by emulating men in their own field, but by the careful development of their natural powers, love of truth and goodness, and those religious sentiments which are their special inheritance, can they become the true helpmeets of men. All that Beatrice was to Dante she would fain have been to the man whom her heart had chosen, — his loving assistant and guide in the upward path of duty, and the glad sharer of the heavenly reward awaiting them at the end.

She recalled the conversation they had held over the picture, when he first brought it to her, standing with her before it to look at it; and the playful contrariness with which Arthur had disputed her opinion of it, professing to consider Dante severely used and slighted.

"I wish she would come down from her pedestal, and stand by his side," Arthur had said. "I am sure it would be much more comfortable," placing his arm about her as if to set the pictured pair an example. "Don't you think Beatrice has a rather self-satisfied expression?"

"Hush, how can you talk like that?" she had reproved him. "She is his guide, and — an angel" —

"His good angel, yes, I know," turning and kissing the other one at his side; "but I wish she would look at him once in a while, and not keep her eyes always fixed in the other direction, making poor Dante strain his neck in that fashion to look up at her. That's reversing Milton's idea with a vengeance;" and he quoted the passage,

"He for God only, she for God in him."

But he was again rebuked for his light-minded treatment of serious subjects.

Rachel examined the face of Beatrice carefully, bearing this criticism in mind. No, that was no expression of righteous complacency, only conscious recognition of the worth, though her own, won through trial, and rewarded with the divine approval. How fortunate was Beatrice that she was able to protect and save her lover; and how justly blamed and execrated would she be had the

journey been of another order, not upward but downward, and had she consented to share it!" Rachel looked into the pure, passionless face of the poet's love, and prayed that she might be like that, putting aside all thoughts of worldly gain and happiness, never elevating the creature above the Creator, and keeping her mind fixed on those precepts and commands which promise an eternal reward.

Just then the door-bell rang; and, though her heart beat violently, she preserved a calm and almost cold exterior as she turned to greet the incoming visitor. It was her father who answered the bell and ushered Arthur into the parlor, remaining a moment on the threshold, as if doubtful whether to enter or withdraw, and turning reluctantly at last to leave them together. Restrained by this presence, the other two could only greet each other formally across the width of the room. The moment her father turned away Arthur took a quick step towards her, opening his arms to clasp her in them; but she stopped him with a slight motion of her hand, and, pointing to a chair, sank tremblingly into another. He noticed then how thin and pale she had grown, and there were lines of suffering in her face that smote him with remorse.

"Have you anything to say to me?" she asked, in a low, constrained tone.

"Anything to say to you?" he repeated.

"Anything concerning the subject we last talked about, I mean."

Her whole look and manner showed the strain of repressed feeling under which she labored; and Arthur, seeing the sharp distress in her face, and the tense, nervous clasp of one small hand upon the other, felt his heart yearn over her in her pain until he forgot his own.

"Dear Ray, let us not speak of that now," he said, gently, and seating himself near her. "If you knew how it hurts me to see you like this. — Let us talk of something else."

"How can we talk of anything else when everything depends on that?"

"Everything? You mean that our marriage"—

"That first of all," she rejoined quickly.

"You throw me off, then!" he cried, springing to his feet. "You make that a fault which is really to my credit. Because I have tried to be honest" —

"You are mistaken; I do not question your honesty."

"Well, then." He looked down on her with a strong, compelling gaze, that made her tremble and turn from him.

"You love me still, Ray," stepping towards her, and holding out his hands; "you know you do."

"And what if I do?" she asked, raising a tor-

tured but resolute face to his. "I will never marry a man I cannot fully trust and believe in."

"You distrust me? I have not deserved that from you, Ray."

"I distrust your judgment. You say you still mean to preach, and to carry on the work of a minister. How can you do that with a wife who disbelieves every word you teach, who has no sympathy nor respect even for such principles?" She spoke with rising excitement, her voice trembling and her cheek flushing.

"You know nothing about my principles," he said, in a little natural resentment. "You condemn before you have heard. Have you ever tried to learn or to understand what I believe?"

"I know you are treading a dangerous way."

"But, if you loved me, Ray, you would be willing to share the danger."

"Not such danger."

"See what a mistake you may make," he went on, in a persuasive tone. "You cast me off, and leave me to go alone to what you believe a fatal end. You have always had great influence over me; how do you know that you might not win me back to the right path?"

He did not know he was repeating an argument she had gone over many times to herself, longing to be convinced of its soundness; but

there was an insincere accent to his words, and she looked up at him rebukingly.

"You are not in earnest," she said; "you know you do not wish to change."

"Very well then, neither do I ask you to change. I leave you free as myself to follow your own convictions."

"Yes, that sounds very reasonable and just; but our positions are quite different. Why should you not leave me free to accept or to reject these new beliefs of yours? According to your own teaching, belief is of no consequence. That is not what we are taught."

"Oh, it is true that we do not believe men are to be eternally lost if they do not think as we do!" he said with a little scorn.

She turned away with a look of cold displeasure.

"What is it you are afraid of?" he burst out with a rush of indignant emotion. "Has God given us the instinct to seek and know the truth, only to punish us everlastingly if we follow it? Has he made the wide, beautiful world for us to live in that we may shut ourselves up in a dungeon and learn to do without air and sunshine? As well say that he has given us lungs with which to breathe the air in order to teach us how to live on noxious vapors. For me, I disown all such degrading fears. They are an insult to my Maker and to my own manhood."

This impetuous outbreak stirred and shook her, and she looked at him with startled attention; but it also frightened and offended her, and the displeased look returned to her face.

"You see I am right," she said, coldly. "It is useless for us to discuss these matters; we have nothing in common."

"Nothing in common!" he cried, seizing her hands. "How can you say that? I have not changed, dear Ray," he went on, in a pleading voice. "I am the same that I have always been. It is folly to talk of our parting. I might as well cut off my right hand." The passion and tenderness of his manner could not but move her.

"You are not the same," she said, brokenly, and struggling to command herself. "You are something very different. We can never be the same to each other"— She could not go on.

"At least, I am unchanged in my love for you."

"Oh, I sometimes think I could have borne it better, if you were not," she cried. "The loss of your love would not be so great as the loss of"— She shuddered and turned away, while a look of bitter gloom settled over his face. Then, with a sudden, swift movement, she turned and flung herself on his breast, and burst into passionate tears. "Oh, I cannot bear it!" she sobbed. "Say that you were not in earnest; that you were

only trying me; that you will think it all over, and take it back. Heaven help me!" raising her streaming eyes to his, and speaking in a tone of solemn adjuration; "I would almost rather see you dead than like this."

Her overwhelming grief nearly unmanned him; and he could only strain her to his heart, while his own tears fell upon her hair. His despair was complete; for, though she was still clinging to him and weeping, she seemed, with the same touch, to be holding him from her in a final clasp of renunciation, and he felt himself powerless to persuade or conquer her.

"God knows I would gladly put myself back in my old place if it would restore your happiness or confidence in me!" he said, when she had grown quieter; "but it is useless to talk about that. I might as well try to reduce my stature to that of boyhood." He spoke with mournful conviction, and with no intention to wound her further; but the comparison was not a happy one, and she withdrew herself from his arms.

"That means, that people who still hold the views you have discarded, — men like Mr. Barnes and Dr. Spaulding," a prominent divine, who had lately preached in Dennison, — "are in their intellectual minority?" with a return of her old manner.

"I do not say that; I do not judge Mr. Barnes

or Dr. Spaulding. They act according to their standards, I suppose, as I am trying to do."

"You seem very confident of yourself. You have changed once; what reason have you to think you may not change again?"

"None," he said, with sad quiet. "It is quite likely I shall change. I stand pledged only to seek the truth, and abide by it."

"And who is the judge of truth?" putting Pilate's question in another form.

"Who, but we, ourselves? Our own reason must decide that. You may not think it, Ray, but your own faith rests on no other support."

"Mine? My faith rests here!" laying her hand, with an expressive gesture, on the large Bible, near which she stood. Arthur turned away with a hopeless feeling at his heart.

"This discussion is useless. We had better end it," she said, a moment after.

"Yes; discussion is quite useless," he made dreary echo.

"And yet, if we were to — to marry, our whole lives would be filled with such discussions."

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed. "Is there no such thing as liberty in marriage, and mutual respect for each other's opinions?"

"And what is that marriage worth which asks for liberty?" she quickly replied. "Oh, you

know, as well as I do, how worthless that argument is!"

There was silence between them for a few moments after this outburst, while they stood, with averted faces and yearning hearts. A step was heard in the next room. She moved quickly towards him.

"We must part," she said, and drew off the plain, gold circlet from her finger, dropping it in his hand, her cold fingers just touching his as she did so. He looked at her in mute misery.

"You think me hard and cruel," she said, struggling to speak calmly. "You said, the other day, my nature was hard," — he made a gesture of silent deprecation; "but sometime you will see that I did only what was right and necessary for us both." She stepped a little back from him, and again they heard a restless footstep in the next room. "You must go now," she said, hurriedly.

"Go!" he repeated, hoarsely, again seizing her hands, and grasping them in his until she nearly cried out with the pain. "You send me away like this! It is true, then, you are hard; you have no mercy; you never loved me," and, with a cry of despair, he flung her hands from him, and rushed from the house.

She looked wildly after him for a moment, then fled, in the same impetuous way, out of the room,

upstairs to her chamber, where she flung herself on her knees by the bed, weeping and sobbing.

"O Father, he is thy child — forgive him — he does not mean — watch over him — and bring him back to the true path!" were the broken words that fell from her lips, thus instinctively commending him she had sent away to that protecting love and mercy, larger than her own, which she had been compelled to deny.

The next day Arthur Forbes packed his trunk, and took the train for New York, where he set sail for Liverpool, to remain abroad a year.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHAPTER IN SOCIAL SCIENCE.

VIRGINIA was persuaded to extend her visit another month; and her presence in the house helped to relieve the double sense of loneliness which Hester felt in her brother's absence whenever she recalled his abrupt departure and the unhappy events leading up to it.

She had a strong affection for this brother, and had confidently looked forward to a worthy career for him, which she now dreaded to see spoiled by this youthful disappointment. She grieved for the pain he suffered, at the same time that she blamed nobody for what had taken place, her well-ordered mind indulging in no useless regrets over the past or idle speculations concerning the future. In her correspondence with Arthur she made it a matter of conscience that her letters should not be the means of raising any false hopes; and, though he searched their contents hungrily, he found but the merest scraps of intelligence on the subject nearest his heart.

Miss Forbes seldom met Miss Armstrong. Though she had no unfriendly feeling towards her, but, on the contrary, held her character in a good

deal of respect, she was quite honest in the belief that these two young people would be better off apart, not seeing how the cause of their present estrangement could be removed, nor how it could do anything but promote continued misunderstanding and unhappiness between them. Miss Forbes believed a true marriage the highest condition of human happiness and well-being; but observation of life as a public reformer had convinced her that such marriages are rare, and she did not wish her brother's added to the list of connubial disappointment. Better that both should suffer a good deal of pain now, she reasoned, than by one mistaken impulse set their whole future awry.

After Virginia left her, Hester settled down to her usual tasks, attending to her correspondence and newspaper work, looking after her household affairs, and assisting Chase Howard in his charitable labors. These last had been greatly increased during the latter part of the winter, by the burning of a wagon-factory in the village, which threw a large band of workmen out of employment, and nearly doubled the usual amount of personal privation and distress. Hester found her time and energies constantly overtasked in this direction; and when the spring came she looked pale and worn. Late in the afternoon of a cold, rainy day in March she returned from a long walk

to the distant end of the town, where she had been to carry some broth and medicine to a sick woman, and was thoroughly chilled and exhausted when she entered the house. Groping her way through the unlighted rooms, she found a match on the library mantel and struck it.

"There now, I was just going to do that," said the servant, Mary, entering the room at that moment from the kitchen. "Land sakes, Miss, you look just used up!" approaching her mistress with an anxious countenance; "just see how wet your skirts are!" stooping, and taking hold of her draggled garments. "You must go upstairs and change them things right off." She spoke with the freedom of an old servant who lived on terms of friendly interest with her employer.

"Yes, Mary, I will go at once," moving towards the door. There she stopped, and looked back. "Did you get any letters?"

She had missed her usual letter from Arthur that week, and was feeling anxious.

"Nothin' but a lot o' papers," the other made haste to reply, hovering between her mistress and the table, and laying one hand upon her arm to push her coaxingly from the room. "Now, you hurry and get off them wet clothes, and I'll make you a good cup of tea."

She listened a moment, while Hester slowly climbed the stairs, then quickly drew out a black-

edged letter from under a newspaper, where she had carefully concealed it, and held it up to the light.

"I wasn't goin' to give her that when she's so tired and all beat out," eying the envelope with strong disfavor. "What do folks want to send such things to folks for, anyway, scarin' 'em out of their wits? Ugh!" shrinking away with healthy disgust, as her fingers came in contact with the sable binding. "I wonder who it's from, any way," inspecting the written address more closely. "'Taint from Mr. Arthur, I know, cause 'taint his handwritin'," apparently in the belief that the deceased, whoever it might be, had sent the letter in person. "There now, I'll put it under these papers and she'll come on it kinder gradual; and now I must hurry up that tea."

When Miss Forbes reëntered the library, after supper, she looked somewhat refreshed; but she was still cold, and stopped a few moments by the register before passing over to the large table in the centre of the room to examine the evening mail. She had torn the wrappers from half a dozen papers, glancing through them, and throwing them aside, before she caught sight of the letter, and, with an exclamation of surprise, took it up. The handwriting was not familiar; but a slight premonitory chill struck her when she saw the postmark, and she tore open the envelope with

trembling fingers. The paper on which the letter was written had no black margin to correspond with the envelope, but was stamped with the printed letter-head of a well-known charitable institution in a distant State. The letter was short, and bore an unknown signature, the writer merely stating that Gerald Wright, superintendent of the institution, died two days before, after a short illness, of malarial fever; and that, according to the provisions of his will, his books and papers, with other personal effects, were bequeathed to Hester Forbes, and the writer awaited instructions as to their disposal.

It was evident that Hester Forbes, as she stood holding the letter in her hands, and looking with intent, unseeing eyes straight before her, had received a heavy blow; but she made no sign. She read the letter again, then mechanically refolded it and laid it on the table. She felt cold, and, drawing the little plaid shawl she wore closer about her shoulders, went over to the register, but with a feebler step than before. The hot, dry blast struck her like a sirocco, and she felt ill and faint, sinking weakly into the nearest chair. She looked old, and her face wore a haggard expression never seen there before, while she still shivered with the cold.

The girl, Mary, entered the room a moment after, and stopped short with a little cry of fright.

"Mercy, Miss, what is the matter?"

"Nothing. I — I don't feel very well. I think I must have taken cold," drawing the shawl still more closely about her.

"It's my belief you've just caught your death," the other said, but in a relieved tone that belied her words. "Dear me, but you gave me such a turn! I thought it was that letter. I hope I didn't do nothin' wrong keepin' it back; but I said to myself 'twont do no harm if she has her tea first. Was it some relation, ma'am?" her curiosity getting the better of her anxiety for the moment.

"No; no relative," her mistress replied in a low tone.

"Well, I'm glad of that; I thought if 'twas one of them committee folks, 'twouldn't hurt them to wait," from which it is to be inferred that the servant held some of her mistress's acquaintances in slight esteem. "Now, ma'am, I think you ought to get to bed right away, and I'll get your hot foot-bath ready, and make you a cup of ginger-tea." These services were gently but firmly declined, Hester bidding the girl to attend to the fires, and close the house for the night, then climbing the stairs again to her room.

The story of Gerald Wright and Hester Forbes is made up of unusual material, such as seldom appears in the romancer's art, and is accounted to

hold its chief value in the statistical reports of science and similar forms of dry learning. The world, however, has outgrown the old elements of romance, the moated castle, the imprisoned princess, and the adventurous knight seeking her rescue, with which the stories of mediæval chivalry thrilled our fancy; and the writer of to-day must be content to deal with those motives and sentiments springing from the more prosaic conditions of an age devoted to the practical. Even in a scientific age, marked by the discovery of the telephone and the associated charities, hearts beat true and make heroic sacrifice for the right; and love, shorn of some imaginative graces, perhaps, still remains to crown life with its sweetest fulfilment, or pierce with sharpest disappointment, the same as in the days of the singing troubadours.

No one could guess, who had taken note of the busy, even tenor of Hester Forbes's life, devoted to the ends of practical reform and the progress of the race, and looked on the silent, melancholy man many hundred miles distant, superintendent of the Institute for Feeble-minded Children, whose days were spent in the slow, sometimes hopeless, task of securing a few rays of intelligence to minds born in worse than midnight darkness, that a bond, "fine as silk, strong as steel," united the hearts of the two; and that deep in the consciousness of each lay a constant thought and re-

membrance of the other, the source of chief strength and blessing to both, and of the sharpest pain either had ever known.

It was during the year of Hester's college-life that the two met each other. Gerald Wright was in the last year of the medical course. He led an unsocial life among his fellow-students, whose society he seemed purposely to avoid, and it was an accident which brought him and Hester Forbes together. The acquaintance thus begun rapidly progressed until it developed into a relation of strong mutual liking and dependence. Hester had known this new friend but a short time before she saw that he lived under a cloud, and that, while standing foremost in scholarship and character among the other students, he seemed the object of their half-pitying regard rather than of any nearer sentiment; but it was long before she learned the cause. Their relation had always been of an impersonal order, not usual in youthful connections of this kind; their talk together turning for the most part on their studies and kindred themes. She had gathered from one or two hints he had let fall that he was unhappy in his home; but, as she had no room-mate, nor companion of her own sex, most of the college gossip escaped her hearing, while her sense of justice, always uppermost, would have led her to take sides with one who seemed in an unfair position.

They took long walks together, a favorite recreation with both, choosing always some path that led away from town into the country. There was one direction, a road leading north from the village, shaded with an attractive row of beech and maple, which Hester had never been able to persuade her companion to take. One day she grew more urgent than usual, setting out at last by herself, and laughingly giving him the choice to come after or return alone. At first he seemed inclined to do the latter, then changed his mind, and, with a gloomy countenance, followed her, muttering something to himself that she could not understand.

They had gone about a mile when they came to a narrow lane running back from the road several rods, and terminating in a small, dilapidated farmhouse, that seemed glad to shelter itself from the public highway. Hester had paused to make some passing comment on the strangeness of the situation, when she was silenced by a remark from her companion.

"I live here," he said, in a tone, of quiet self-scorn.

She turned, and looked at him in surprise, when at that moment she was startled by a loud shout, and, glancing up the lane, she gave a little scream of fright.

A huge, misshapen figure, a giant's in size, but

less than a child's in the control it seemed to have of its limbs, came running and stumbling towards them, waving its arms, and uttering loud cries of delight. Reaching Gerald's side, it threw itself down at his feet, and, twining its long arms about him, made a low whinnying noise. Immediately after, a small, pale-haired woman came out from the house, and walked rapidly down the lane, who, when she recognized her son, and saw a stranger with him, stopped and looked timidly from one to the other, frightened at the expression of Gerald's countenance, and wondering at this unlooked-for scene.

"How do you do, mother?" he said, after a moment's silence, extending his hand to draw her near him, and stooping to kiss her thin cheek. "This is Miss Forbes." He turned to the latter, and faced her for the first time with a look of calm despair. "And this," he added, laying his hand on the shaggy, brute-like head of the creature beside him, "is my brother George."

"Brudder Dorge," the idiot repeated, nodding his head in confirmation of this statement, and favoring Hester with a friendly grin, in which he displayed all his yellow teeth, some of which were long and fang-shaped like a dog's.

With an effort Hester collected herself, and, stepping forward, clasped the little woman's hand in her own, an immense pity swelling in her heart,

and overcoming for the time her fear and repugnance.

"Miss Forbes is tired, mother; we have walked too far. I shall get the horse, and take her home, and then I shall come back, and stay all night." He spoke a quiet word to his brother, who sprang to his feet with a loud yell, and ran before them to the house, leaping and stumbling, in the same heedless fashion as before.

Mrs. Wright placed a chair for her guest in the middle of the small, poorly-furnished room, and the idiot, after eying her with profound scrutiny a moment, as if questioning her right to be there, assented to the arrangement with a chuckle of satisfaction, and curled himself up at her feet.

"George, come away," said his brother, sternly; but the other did not move.

"George, go and help brother find old Whitey," said his mother, in a more conciliatory tone; but George was supremely contented where he was, and neither to be threatened nor cajoled from his present position, looking up at Gerald with a threatening scowl when the latter, in a more peremptory manner, repeated his command.

"Don't cross him," said his mother, in a low voice. "He will not hurt her." Poor woman, she had so much to bear in the control of this terrible offspring of hers that it was no wonder she had

small sympathy to bestow on the needless fears and sensibilities of strangers. It was Hester herself who came to the rescue, looking up at Gerald with a brave smile. "Let him stay," she said. "I — I am not afraid," and to prove it, she put out one trembling hand, and laid it softly on the idiot's shoulder, who responded to this mark of confidence by sitting perfectly still, manifesting only that dumb, trembling sense of delight which animals often show at some unexpected touch or caress from their master. With a face pale as death Gerald left the room.

"It is so hard to manage him, when he is angry," said the mother, when they were left alone. She cast a quick, expressive look towards an iron padlock and chain, fastened to the floor, in one corner of the room. Hester read the meaning of that ugly symbol, and shuddered, while the idiot cast a cunning leer upwards in her face, then frowned, and shook his big fist at the chain. He had taken a strong fancy to their visitor; and crawling about the floor, brought all his possessions and piled them in her lap, — a curious collection of children's toys and rubbish, with now and then some object of real beauty, a cluster of wild berries, or bit of colored glass, treasured, apparently, for no other reason than the pleasure they afforded the owner's eye.

Hester, compelling herself to overcome every

other feeling, tried to interest and amuse her ungainly host, with such marked success that she began to fear she had made a mistake, and that he would be troublesome when she came to go away. George, however, was in an amiable humor, that held out to the last; and, except that he evinced a mischievous desire to hang on behind, when the buggy was brought to the door, and Hester and Gerald had seated themselves in it, he allowed them to depart unmolested, sending a few uproarious shouts of laughter after them as they rode slowly down the lane and out upon the road.

They had returned half the distance to town before a word was spoken between them, when Gerald, stealing a look at his companion, whose face wore the same pale, frightened look as at first, felt a remorseful shock pass through him.

"I have been a brute," he said, "and a coward; but you cannot despise me more than I despise myself."

"Hush!" she said, in a low tone; "I do not despise you."

"You do not?" He bent towards her with a sudden, eager light in his face; but she trembled, and drew farther away from him, and his expression quickly changed.

"Now you know what I meant the other day, when I told you I was a doomed man. A mark is set on me, worse than Cain's." She could not

answer him, and he went on. "This curse has hung over our family for generations. Two brothers besides this one came into the world as he did; but they were weak and sickly, and mercifully died when they were children. I alone, have escaped, — escaped," he repeated, with a bitter accent. "This brother you saw is the exact image of an uncle, my mother's oldest brother, whose father, also, had an imbecile brother. I have heard my mother say she did a wicked thing, when she married my father. She lived to hear him reproach and taunt her for making him the father of idiot children."

"Oh, shame!" exclaimed his listener, with indignation.

"My father was a proud man," the other replied, with a touch of defence. "He had been deceived. My mother was forbidden to speak of the curse, and was forced into the marriage. They led a bitter life. When the war came my father left home, and was killed." His voice sank, and they rode on in silence.

"It escaped my mother — the curse, I mean"—

"Don't," she entreated, "don't speak of it in that way."

"Why, what else is it?" turning fiercely upon her. "Do you want me to call it a dispensation of Providence, and insult God?"

She could only reply to this with a faint moan

of protest, feeling herself borne helplessly along the current of his righteous anger and despair.

"It escaped my mother," he began again, "only to fall, with threefold vengeance on her children. As soon as I was old enough to know what it meant I swore that this thing should die with me. We are the last branch of the family, and I took a proud satisfaction in my vow. I was to be the great benefactor of a race never to exist. I was a fool!"

The young woman beside him kept perfectly still. A new fear was rising within her, and the weight of a new anguish began to press heavily on her heart.

"It seemed an easy vow," the other went on, bent on relieving the pent-up flood of feeling in his breast. "I had never cared for women; I had other business on hand. I am properly punished, I suppose, for my conceit and ignorance." He turned towards her, and their eyes met. She was imposing a severe restraint on herself, her hands clasping each other in a resolute grasp, her face and figure held in a stony quiet; but, when she saw the helpless anguish of his look, a spasm of pain crossed her face, and large tears rose to her eyes, and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"Don't do that!" he said sharply. "It will drive me mad;" and almost immediately the tears were forced back to their source.

"Only say that you forgive me," in a pleading tone, as they drew near the village, "for the rude shock I have given you, and all the deception I have practised on you."

"There is nothing to forgive," she said, and put out her hand. He caught it in his strong clasp, and held it there.

"I — I shall want you to feel that I am your — your true friend always." They were drawing near home and it was easier to speak now. "I shall always believe in you; and don't — don't have these hard thoughts; put them away. Try to look at it differently. It will be hard, I know, — don't think I do not understand how hard it will be." There was an imploring accent in these last words, as if she were pleading for another besides himself, and his hand clasped hers like a vise. "But you are strong; you — you will overcome — you must not despair; you" — She could go no further, and the next moment the horse turned from the road, and stopped before her door. He got out and lifted her to the ground, and, under cover of the gathering darkness, held her in a half embrace.

"I said I knew nothing about women," he said, in a smothered voice. "It is enough to have known you. The remembrance of you will be my greatest happiness and my greatest pain. I love you — I shall always love you; but I will never

see you again!" He bent nearer, and kissed her. Like one in a dream, where all the senses are held in dumb despair, and the fear of some great catastrophe to come, she turned and passed up the narrow walk leading to the house. As she entered and closed the door behind her she heard, in the same unreal, far-off way, the roll of departing wheels down the street.

It was all over. The struggle had been sharp and unexpected, and ended almost as soon as begun. Indeed, it might be questioned whether, on her part, there had been any struggle, since everything had been settled without her help. Was she relieved that this was so? Would she have changed this result if the chance had been offered her? She made a candid search of her own heart and answered, "No;" but, even as she did so, she knew how far short she fell of those standards of womanly trust and loyalty — that sweet, unreasoning faith that clings blindly to its object under all circumstances — engendered in false sentiment and a romantic sense of duty. The same native sense of right sustained her then, as a young woman of twenty, that had been her chief reliance ever since. There was another thought that helped to sustain her. No matter how the world might misunderstand and condemn, he would always understand and judge her aright; and this thought remained to support her through all the

years that followed. Hester Forbes had always felt herself wedded to the man of her first unchanging choice. Her life had been solitary, but chiefly in its external aspect, never in the deeper loneliness of the soul obliged to pass through the world and own itself unrecognized to the end. Now that Gerald Wright was dead, she felt herself truly widowed, if not in the outward form; yet not bereft of comfort. He was scarcely more removed from her dead than living; and now there remained but one to pierce the veil of the unknown, and see what was to come after.

CHAPTER X.

A SOCIAL VISIT OR TWO.

WHEN Miss Forbes came into possession of what was left her by Gerald Wright's will she set herself at once to the work of examining his papers, a task not more sad than consoling. On every page of the private journal, and of the larger books of memoranda relating to the writer's work in the institute in which he died, she read the record of a pure and noble life, which made her heart swell with gratitude and pride, and raised a strong desire to perpetuate its memory. Here was the mental impress of a man who had never sought greatness; who, with more than a martyr's courage, had known not only how to accept defeat, but how to make all the bitter disadvantages of his lot stepping-stones to a higher usefulness and the lasting benefit of his kind. Thoroughly skilled in the most difficult branch of medical science, Gerald Wright had renounced all ends of worldly fame and gain to devote himself to the work he seemed born to perform. The sum of these toilsome labors, and the methods of careful investigation underlying them, were found here, in the closely-written pages of journal and

note-book, which the world would gladly recognize the value of. Miss Forbes was sufficiently informed on such subjects to be sure of this; and she determined to publish a memoir of her dead friend. This resolve once formed, she wished to enter on its execution at once; but, after a few days' trial, was obliged to give up the work on account of physical indisposition. She had not yet recovered from the effects of that raw March day's exposure when she returned home to find the news of the black-edged letter awaiting her. Something of a low fever, accompanied by a mental inertia she could not shake off, hung over her; and, though she rose from her bed each day, and tried to go about the house as usual, she was obliged to own herself thoroughly weak and unfit for work. Her faithful servant watched her anxiously at this time, urging her to send for a doctor, and suggesting a dozen new remedies of her own every day.

"Why don't you send for that city woman?" she asked one day, after she had arranged the pillows for her mistress' comfort on the lounge. "That one with the ear-rings, I mean, I always liked her."

"Send for Virginia Fairfax?" her mistress repeated, with newly aroused attention. "I never thought of that."

"Well, ma'am, it's my belief she's just the one you want. She'd cheer you up, and help you to get well. Now, you rest awhile, and then write

her a letter, and I'll take it to the office this very day."

Hester pondered this advice, and concluded it was very good. She was more dull than ill, and needed the contact of a fresh, invigorating presence like Virginia's. In the breezy atmosphere of her friend the old life-currents would start anew, and she would regain the strength to enable her to resume the work she had planned; so she wrote and asked Virginia to come and spend a fortnight with her.

Virginia read the letter with conflicting emotions, the sense of loyalty to her friend, and the desire to be with her, struggling with other half-formed instincts and fears, which affected her the more powerfully that she was unwilling to give them conscious shape. The prospect of another visit to Dennison had sent the blood coursing swiftly through her veins, and brought an excited flush to her cheeks; but this exultant feeling died out, and she threw down the letter, saying, hurriedly to herself, "No, no; I can never go in the world. It would be perfectly brazen." Then she took up the letter, and read it again.

"Poor Hester!" she murmured; "what is the matter, I wonder? I never knew her to be so despondent before; she really needs me;" and the struggle was renewed.

The moralists have a good deal to say about

the difficulty of performing one's duty when all one's wishes and temptations lie another way, but have left untouched the more perplexing question of how we are to decide when the motives of self-interest and our secret desires unite themselves to the sense of obligation, making the thing we ought to do appear only the thing we want to do. Virginia, however, owned a power of sensible reflection and judgment that her manner often belied; and, when she had carefully considered the subject, she had no doubt what she ought to do. Her friend was ill and out of spirits, and had called on her for help; and, steadily putting aside all other thoughts, she began preparations to leave home at once. Having thus decided to go, a feeling of real dread and hesitation took possession of her, and she could honestly say that she would rather stay at home, though, on the whole, this feeling made it easier for her to start immediately. The reader requires an explanation of this curious mental behavior.

Virginia's last visit to Dennison had extended itself through a period of two months, during which her acquaintance with Chase Howard had made considerable progress; and she had parted from him with the feeling that she had gained, not a friend exactly, — for theirs was no such quiet, even-tempered relation as goes by the name of friendship, — nor an admirer exactly, — since he

was always disputing and trying to put her down, — but an interesting and valuable acquaintance. That classification would serve as well as another; for, as Virginia said to herself, it was nothing to admit that Mr. Howard was interesting; and, since she had learned a great many things from him she had never known before, and he had made her see a number of the old things in a new light, she must acknowledge him to be a valuable acquaintance as well.

As Mr. Howard had frequently mentioned his mother and sister to her she was not surprised when, sitting in her room one day after her return to the city, the neat serving-maid brought her their cards. With a little embarrassment, unusual in Virginia, she went down to the drawing-room to meet them.

Mrs. Howard was a small, stately old lady, with gray puffs on each side of her face, that gave their owner a look of social distinction, and dressed in black for the departed rector, her husband. She had a majestic way of talking, and referring to "my son," which amused Virginia, whom she both patronized and deferred to in a manner that implied she neither accepted nor rejected her for the present, holding her at arm's length while she subjected her to more careful observation. The daughter was modelled, physically, after the mother, but had the shy, retreat-

ing manners of one perpetually put aside and kept in the background.

Mrs. Howard was English, and held the independent character of American youth and its manners in the strongest disapproval. She had brought up her own daughter in direct opposition to such models, an example of the modest and inoffensive young ladyhood which an older civilization can produce. Virginia remembered that Chase Howard always spoke of his mother in a tone of filial regard; but there was a different accent in his voice when he mentioned his sister, giving hint of a nearer sympathy and understanding.

"He respects his mother, and minds her, — I believe she would make him mind, even now; but he loves his sister," was her inward comment, as her eyes rested with soft friendliness on the younger woman.

She felt that she was undergoing a mental inventory from both her guests as she sat before them answering the old lady's questions, and trying, by an occasional side-glance and remark, to include the other.

"My son was not obliged to take so small a parish as that at Dennison," said Mrs. Howard, straightening her short figure to its full height. "He was offered his father's place at St. Mark's. I did not approve of it; I was opposed to his going to Dennison."

"Then he does not mind her," was Virginia's relieved thought. She turned to the daughter, with a smile.

"Mr. Howard spoke very often of his sister. He hopes you will visit him before long." The girl flushed, and looked pleased.

"I should like to, so much, if mamma could spare me," with a glance towards her relative.

"We will go together," the latter said; "my daughter never travels without me," in a manner meant to convey a strong rebuke of the practices of the day.

"You will come and see us soon?" she said, with a more gracious accent, as she rose to take her leave. "We are to have a fair next week, to raise funds for the new rectory. Perhaps you will come to that — but I forget," with a return of her former stiffness; "you are not a church-woman, I believe my son wrote?"

Virginia blushed, but not with any feeling of moral delinquency. "I shall be very glad to help you, though," she replied. "I have no denominational prejudices. Are you to have a booth?" she asked the daughter, who had also risen, and was standing in her mother's shadow.

"N — no," was the hesitating reply; "at least not by myself. Mamma thinks it best the younger women should work under the supervision of the older ones. I am to help her."

Virginia groaned inwardly. Her remark about "denominational prejudices" had struck disagreeably on the ears of her visitor, whose face assumed a gloomy and forbidding expression as she made her farewell greetings to her hostess, which Virginia returned with a more formal acknowledgment than usual, though she could not resist holding out her hand to the daughter.

"Good-by," she said; "I hope we shall see each other again."

She received no reply except that given in a swift, admiring look upwards into her face and a warm pressure of the hand. The next moment the door closed, and both visitors were gone. Virginia remained standing a few moments where they had left her, a curious smile playing over her face.

"She's a perfect dragon," she said, at last, letting her hands fall to her sides. "I feel sorry for that girl. 'My daughter never travels without me,'" in a mimicking tone; then, dropping her voice to a tragic depth, and with a severe frown, "'You are not a church-woman, I believe?' What else did 'my son' write, I wonder?" tossing her head. "Well, I shall not be in any hurry to return that call."

Mrs. Howard and her daughter took their places in the hired carriage awaiting them at the door. They could not afford the outlay; but the rector's wife would as soon have entered the sacred pre-

cincts of St. Mark's without her bonnet as to have gone to pay a social visit in a street-car,—a mode of conveyance which might serve the needs of the promiscuous public very well, but which the better classes should make as sparing use of as possible, as one of the dangerous levelling institutions of the day, tending to obliterate all true distinctions.

"I liked her, mamma," the daughter ventured to say, after they had gone a short distance.

"Don't be foolish, Hetty; you don't know whether you liked her or not."

But your suppressed young woman is not always a stupid one; and Hetty knew that, if her mother did not wholly approve of Miss Fairfax, she had been secretly impressed by her, taking gratified notice of all the signs of wealth and social consequence that entered into her surroundings. The handsome house, with its rich appointments and its well-trained servants, the fashionable quarter in which it was located, and, finally, the attractive appearance of Virginia herself, each had produced its effect.

"Such a pretty house!" Hetty began again, heedless of another admonition. "I like a house to look like that, with lots of nice things scattered about and in the way. Ours looks so stiff, somehow," with a sigh.

"Hetty, I am surprised at you; and I wish you would learn to express yourself differently. 'Lots

of nice things ' is an expression a shop-girl might use." Hetty sighed again, reflecting that the life of a shop-girl might not be without its compensations.

"I shouldn't blame Chase if he liked her too," she began after a few moments' silence, for it was impossible for her to keep still always. "Do you suppose she likes him, mamma?"

"Such things are not proper subjects for a child like you to be thinking about," said her mother, descending from the carriage, which had now reached their residence, and leaving the "child," who had reached her twenty-third birthday, to follow.

Virginia kept her word, and did not return this call until near the holidays. She had been only a few moments in Mrs. Howard's presence when she heard the news of the expected arrival of the son of the household, — news which seemed to have its effect beforehand in the look of happy anticipation which shone in the faces of both mother and daughter, moderating the stiff restraint of the older woman's manner into a friendly warmth, and making the younger nearly forget her shyness.

It was Hetty who announced the news, turning an eager face to their visitor, as if sure of meeting a sympathetic response, while Mrs. Howard listened with an expression of maternal pride, and forgot to reprove her daughter.

"He can only remain with us a few days," the mother added. "I dare say he will want to call on you."

Virginia made a polite reply, but ventured the opinion that, if Mr. Howard's time was so short, he would prefer to spend it all with his family.

"Oh, I am sure he will call!" Hetty answered impulsively, then as suddenly checked herself, at a glance from her mother. Virginia smiled, and said, "Then he must bring you with him."

Hetty perhaps lacked the courage to repeat this suggestion; for, when Chase Howard mounted the stone steps leading to Virginia's residence, a few days later, he was alone. The neatly-dressed maid brought her his card; and, after allowing a proper interval to elapse, she went down to receive him. He stood awaiting her in the big drawing-room, but with only a careless eye for the "nice things scattered about," which had attracted his sister's attention, stepping quickly towards Virginia, as she crossed the threshold, clasping her hand in his. The latter had intended to receive this visit in the drawing-room, surrounding it with all the conventional safeguards; but a sudden impulse made her change her mind, and she led the way into a small curtained room at the end of the larger one, where a bright coal-fire burning in the grate, the latest magazines and a dainty

work-basket, betokened its more privileged and private use.

They sat opposite each other, and talked of many things, Virginia holding the reins of conversation in her own hands. She was in animated spirits, her companion being very quiet for him, and in a more yielding mood than usual, the effect perhaps of his release from duty. She wore one of her odd, picturesque costumes, black silk, relieved by unexpected touches of crimson here and there, and a cluster of geraniums perched carelessly among her dark braids.

"You make a short visit," she said, after a while, and in response to some remark of his about his return to Dennison.

"Yes; I must be back for the last Sunday in Advent."

Virginia cast her eyes up towards the ceiling, in saucy reflection. "What is that?"

The other smiled forbearingly. "I see," he replied, "you want to make a display of heretical ignorance. I don't think I'll tell you. I doubt if you are in a teachable frame of mind."

"Oh, yes, I am!" folding her hands, with a docile expression. "You ought not to miss any of your opportunities. Don't you want to convert me?"

"Yes, I do," leaning towards her, and speaking with sudden gravity.

She started a little, and caught her breath, falling back in her chair, as if to put a wider space between them, then recovered herself, and laughed.

"I thought Episcopalians didn't believe in conversion?" she said, avoiding his eye, and trifling with the lace on her sleeve.

"If they do not, it is because they believe in something much better," was the reply; "in religious growth and the opportunity for spiritual exercise and development which the church affords."

He spoke with increased earnestness, still leaning towards her and regarding her with a serious, penetrating look that she would have been glad to escape. "Is he really trying to convert me?" she asked herself with mingled exultation and fear. She appeared to reflect a moment on what he had said, and then replied, with much seeming candor, that that certainly seemed more sensible.

"Oh, you'll find us quite sensible," he said; "we are not so moth-eaten and effete in our ideas as you seem to think!"

Virginia welcomed this little touch of spleen, feeling safer in the presence of these domineering moods, which she had made acquaintance with before, than in that other she had just witnessed.

"Come now," he said in a more persuasive tone, "what do you know about us any way?"

Virginia hesitated a moment. "Well, I know

about the thirty-nine articles, for one thing," she began.

"What is the matter with the thirty-nine articles? You think, perhaps, there should be only thirty-eight?" She laughed and said she should go farther than that. He rose from his chair, straightening his long figure with an impatient movement, and walked over to rest an elbow on the curtained mantel, a large olive-colored screen, ornamented with a blue peacock, serving as background.

"Strange," he exclaimed, "what false and foolish notions people have about such things! We are willing to honor age and experience in everything else; but in matters of religious belief everything must be of the newest pattern and invention, warranted a purely original article. We pay some respect to our ancestors in other matters, and prize whatever of their possessions have come down to us" —

"If you mean that the thirty-nine articles have the same value as my grandmother's teapot," Virginia interrupted.

"I mean nothing of the kind," he quickly replied. "What I mean is that it is a pity we cannot put this boasted modern reason of ours to some better purpose than wholesale destruction. I think as much of my reason as you do of yours."

Here Virginia interrupted him again to say,

with an air that contradicted her words, that she did not think so very much of hers; had come, in fact, to regard it as rather an inferior article.

"You're right enough there," was the blunt reply. "It's a poor resource for the best of us, taken alone, I mean. You cannot measure the aspirations of the soul with a square and compass. What does your own Emerson say? — that 'we cannot prove our faith by syllogisms.' The logical faculty is well enough in its place; but it is by no means the highest."

"Reason, will, intelligence," said Virginia, counting off the words on her fingers; "the last is the highest. I learned that in my mental philosophy at school."

"And intelligence is something more than the power to perceive that two and two make four; it includes sentiment and imagination."

"Then you make religion a mere matter of sentiment?"

"What is higher than a sentiment?" he inquired, warmly. "What is better in a man than the feeling he has for his mother, — or," dropping his voice, "for his Maker?"

"Yes," said Virginia, in a yielding tone. "Herbert Spencer teaches that too, — that feeling precedes knowledge."

"Ah, well, that settles it then."

He took a few impatient turns about the room,

coming back and standing directly in front of her.

"You think the world was badly off before Spencer came along to teach it something."

"Oh, no! I dare say the world did the best it could. I am glad he came along in time to teach me something," looking up at him with an assured smile. The clock on the mantel struck twelve, and he looked at it in surprise. "I must go," he said; "I have stayed longer than I ought, and made myself very disagreeable."

"Oh, not more than usual!" said Virginia, rising to accompany him to the door. "But you will never convert any one," she added, in a commiserating tone; "you are too impatient." He sighed, and looked downcast.

"I am afraid that is true," he said.

"Oh, well," she went on, excusingly, "we shall never agree on these subjects, of course! After this we will talk of something else."

"Don't say that," in a voice half angry, half pained. "Why should we not agree? What is it you believe, any way?"

"That is what you will never take pains to find out," — a clever reply, which saved the necessity of attempting a more difficult one. If there was a merited reproof in it, it passed by unnoted.

"At least, I know one thing. A woman like you can never rest content with the pale negations

of a liberal creed. Such doctrines are fit only for the intellectual dry-bones; they will never satisfy you. Your nature is too rich; you have too good a mind."

"I know you think a great deal of my mind."

"I think enough of it," he said, rather brusquely; "but I think more of"— he broke off abruptly. "Good-by," he said, extending his hand. "When are you coming to Dennison?" he asked, retaining it in his.

"Oh, not for a long time!" was the confident reply. "Hester must come and see me first."

"I may take another run up here about Easter;" then they both blushed a little, repeating their good-bys, and he took his leave of her.

CHAPTER XI.

PROGRESSING ACQUAINTANCE.

WHEN Virginia reached her friend's house, and looked into her face, she threw aside all her scruples, and told herself she had done exactly right to come.

"My poor Hester!" she murmured, bending over the arm-chair, in which the other had formed a habit of sitting of late. "You are tired out, and half sick. I will tell you what I am going to do. I shall take charge of everything myself while I am here; I shall go to market and order the meals; you are not to know what there is for dinner until you sit down to the table."

Hester smiled, and admitted that that would be a relief; and Virginia went into the kitchen to consult with the ruler of that department.

"Now, Mary, you and I are to take all this house-keeping care to ourselves. I am to be mistress, — at least, we will play that I am mistress." The girl's face, which showed a dubious expression at first, wore a smile that indicated her willingness to enter into the sport.

"You must come to me for everything, and not trouble Miss Forbes. I want her to have perfect

rest, and not have to think about things, — except, of course, those things she wants to think about."

The other seemed to comprehend this distinction, expressing the opinion, however, that the things her mistress wanted to think about were the things that did her the most harm, keeping her up nights, and taking her out in all sorts of weather; but she promised a ready assistance in the new plan, and they began to talk over the bill-of-fare for dinner. Virginia glanced into the bread-pan, and praised the lightness of its rising contents; and, after instructing her charge in the mysteries of a new pudding-sauce, took a basket on her arm, and went out to market.

The girl paused in her work, and stood looking after her in a contemplative attitude, with one hand on her hip.

"'Taint every one I'd let come bossin' me 'round in my own kitchen; but she's so kinder cute about it you don't seem to mind. Seems to know what's what, too; though I did feel like sayin' something back when she spoke of the gravy's bein' lumpy."

The effect of the new inmate's presence in the house was at once apparent. Virginia owned the happy art of living in the whole of a house at once, while Hester, with her simple needs and still habits, was never able to occupy more than two or three rooms. When she was alone the greater portion of the house was kept closed, and

had a deserted look. Now, however, doors and shutters were thrown wide open to let in the spring sunshine, growing milder each day. The very furniture seemed to have changed character; the chairs and tables, which had held themselves in rigid seclusion along the walls and in dark corners, coming out to group themselves in sociable clusters, or hint an invitation to some choice resting-place by sunny window or dreamy fireside. Something of the old immaculate order was missing; but such signs of disorder as were noticed carried a visual refreshment along with them. That is a pleasant suggestion which is conveyed in the folds of a bright-colored shawl dropped carelessly on a chair, or the long, curling sweep of a gray feather hanging over the piano-lid. Every touch of Virginia's seemed to leave a spot of color, and her rustling passage through the rooms had the effect of an electric current, imparting new life to the atmosphere.

"She does brighten things up wonderful," the girl Mary said, "though I get tired sometimes pickin' up her things; but, Land! folks is so diff'rent! It's as natural for Miss Hester to hang up her bonnet as it is to breathe."

When Sunday came Virginia took a book, and seated herself before her friend in the library.

"Are you not going to church?" the latter inquired.

Virginia replied, indifferently, that she did not think she cared to.

"I thought you might want to hear Mr. Howard. I forgot to tell you that he was here last evening while you were out. He did not know you were in town, and would have waited to see you; but he had a vestry meeting to attend."

The other made some careless reply, turning the leaves of her book, and asked Hester where she should begin. That same evening, as they sat together in the confidential twilight, Virginia heard her friend's history. It was she who stood in need of the sheltering dusk; for Hester told her story quietly, in a voice that scarcely faltered from beginning to end, while her listener's face, had it been visible, would have shown a host of conflicting emotions, — surprise, pity, relief, exultation, sweeping over it by turns.

"Hester too!" she exclaimed under her breath, when she had caught the drift of what her friend was saying; "Hester too!" This was the sum of her whole conclusion at first. "Then she could not blame any one else, if" — was her next unfinished reflection; for there are some thoughts to which we never give full expression, even in our own minds, and no one else has a right to do so for us.

When Hester had finished, Virginia rose, and stepped quickly across the intervening space to

her side, clasping her arms about her neck, and kissing her.

"I never loved you half so well as now," and, slipping to the floor, she rested her head against the other's arm, taking her hand, and the two women remained silent for a time.

"What is love, Hester?" the younger asked, at last.

"Who can tell?" the other replied, musingly. "Something too strange to define, — the great primal force of the moral world, perhaps, as gravitation is of the physical." Pausing a moment, she continued: —

"Love is like light, I often think. The nature that presents a clear medium to it becomes transfused with the purest beauty and a holy radiance; but, often it is doomed to suffer pitiful distortion, and is broken into a hundred rays of disappointment and pain. We love as we live, according to our natures and the bent of the circumstances surrounding us."

"Then you do not think it a weakness for a woman to" —

"To love?" Hester continued fearlessly; "not when she loves wisely, and not always when she loves unwisely. Love itself is not a weakness; it is the human judgment that errs."

"And your brother and Miss Armstrong?"

Hester sighed. "Poor Arthur! He thought me hard and unsympathetic, I am afraid; but the test

he would have put upon love was a severe one. Perfect love must rest on a common purpose and belief concerning the great questions of life and duty; though there is sometimes a likeness of taste and disposition between two people that takes the place of this."

"Yes, yes," Virginia quickly assented; "I am sure that is so. Some people resemble each other more in their differences than others do in"— She paused, finding it difficult to go on. The entrance of the girl, a few moments later, with lights put an end to the conversation; and, wishing to be alone, Virginia soon after bade her friend good-night.

When she offered to act as Hester's substitute she forgot those benevolent labors and enterprises in which her friend was so actively engaged; and it was with great reluctance that she prepared to enter into this part of her work. She had had but little experience in the work of practical charity, most of her duties in this respect having been discharged by means of a vote at some directors' meeting, or in the shape of a subscription and accompanying check; and actual contact with the real suffering and misery which these measures of relief represented was new to her. But the sense of personal unfitness was not the strongest motive which withheld her. She knew that Chase Howard was Hester's constant assistant

in labors of this kind, and that she ran the risk of meeting him every time she set out on one of her errands of mercy. Twice she had run this risk, and escaped; but she was none the better able to control a feeling of nervous trepidation, when, in obedience to Hester's instructions, she left the house one afternoon to take a roll of flannel to Johnny Ryan, who had been suffering from rheumatism all winter, and a basket of delicacies to a sick woman in the same neighborhood. She gave one swift glance around the room, as she crossed the threshold of Johnny's cottage, and assuring herself that he was alone closed the door, and went to the bedside with a relieved face.

"So Miss Forbes sent me them, did she?" the man asked, after Virginia had explained her errand, and regarding the flannels with a disappointed look. "Well, ye can say I thank her, ma'am. What ye got in that basket?" turning his look on the small hamper Virginia had placed on the table.

"That is some chicken-broth and jelly for Mrs. Brown. You have some one to cook for you, you know, and Mrs. Brown hasn't."

Yes, the man slowly admitted, he had; but his daughter worked out all day, and didn't get home till late. "Mis' Brown won't want none o' them things," he added, fretfully; "she's ben tuk

worse, and most likely's dyin' by this time. Chicken-broth won't do her no good."

Virginia expressed her surprise at this news, and prepared to depart at once.

"Ye aint goin'," he said, in a disappointed tone.

"Why, I think I ought to," Virginia replied, looking down at him. "If Mrs. Brown is worse she needs me more than you do. Poor man," she added softly, "you get very lonesome lying here alone all day. Does no one come to see you?"

"Yes, there's Father Feehan; he comes sometimes."

"Oh, then you are a Catholic, and Father Feehan takes care of you!" seating herself a moment at his side.

"And there's Mr. Howard, he comes too. Ye're really goin', then," he added, in the old, complaining tone, as Virginia started nervously to her feet.

"Yes, I must go," she replied, hurriedly. "No, I can't leave you any of this broth," as the man's eyes turned again on the basket; "but," hesitating, as she remembered that Hester would disapprove, "I will give you this," placing a silver coin in his hand. "Your daughter can buy a chicken, and make some broth herself. Tell her to cut it up and wash it nicely, and cook it slowly in a little water;" and, cutting short his thanks, she turned, and left the cottage.

When she entered the still poorer abode of Mrs.

Brown, she found herself in the midst of a scene of confusion and distress, such as she had never before witnessed. A woman with pale, gaunt features lay on the bed, her head rolling restlessly on the pillow, over which her hair streamed in wild disorder; while her dark eyes, brilliant with approaching death, fixed themselves with an imploring gaze on Virginia as, awestruck and a little afraid, she drew near the bed. Two or three poorly dressed women of the neighborhood stood near, and a little girl was crying in the corner of the room. One of the former was trying to persuade the sick woman to swallow some medicine, and Virginia, taking the tumbler from her, added her own entreaties, but in vain.

"It's no use," she murmured hoarsely; and, looking up at Virginia with a piteous gaze, she tried to say something the other could not understand. Bending nearer to catch the sound more distinctly, she quickly raised her head, turning a surprised and questioning look towards the other women.

"Mr. Howard?" she repeated, in a perplexed tone; "what does she want of Mr. Howard?"

"He's her minister," was the low reply; but Virginia still did not seem to understand, turning a mystified face towards the sick woman.

"Don't you see?" the latter said, speaking in a quick, painful gasp, — "I'm dying."

Virginia started back with a shocked expression. "Mr. Howard should be sent for at once."

"We have sent for him, miss," one of the women replied. "He'll be here soon;" but Virginia, alarmed lest he should be too late, started impulsively towards the door, as if to go in search of him herself. She opened it just in time to see him coming up the walk.

"Miss Fairfax, — you here?" he exclaimed.

"Hush!" she whispered, repressing his surprise. "I came in Hester's place. I was so afraid you wouldn't get here. You must go in at once — she's dying."

The woman stepped aside and made way for him, as he drew near the bedside; while Virginia, seating herself with her face in another direction, drew the sobbing child to her arms, and held her there during the solemn scene that followed.

After asking a question or two, and quieting her with a few friendly words, the young clergyman drew a small prayer-book from his pocket, and began in a low voice to read the service for the sick and dying.

As Virginia listened, wonderingly, her heart began to tremble and melt with a new feeling of religious awe and tenderness. The strange scene in which she was forced to bear a part made a powerful impression on her. She had never heard the service for the dying before, nor, indeed,

known there was one; but now, as the voice of fervent supplication went up from the dying woman's couch, it bore her soul along with it, as if on strong pinions, and it seemed to her that no form of worship could be more beautiful and appropriate than this. She remained where she was, still holding the child, after the last words were spoken, and for a long time no sound was heard but the faint, gasping breath of the dying woman, which grew weaker with each repetition, until in a few moments the low-spoken words of the minister, "It is all over," told that the end had come. He drew the sheet carefully over the stiff, pinched features, and, turning away, held a short consultation with the two women on what remained to be done; then crossed over to where Virginia sat, the child slipping from her arms as he approached.

"Are you going home soon?" he asked.

She raised her face to reply, and he saw that her eyes were full of unshed tears, the sight of which so moved him that he closed his hand warmly over hers.

"This has been too much for you," he said; "you are not used to such things."

"Can I do nothing?" she asked.

"Nothing, I think, unless," — he hesitated a moment, — "unless you can see about a shroud for the poor woman."

There was no need of imposing even this slight service on her, but he could not resist the impulse to continue to associate her with him as long as possible. Virginia promised her assistance, and after a few words of final counsel and instruction to the other women they left the house together. It was dark, and Howard drew his companion's hand through his arm. They walked at a lingering pace, and exchanged but few words. The circumstances of this unlooked-for meeting had wrought each to a high mood, from which it was impossible to descend to any common or trivial topic. Each had caught a glimpse of something new in the other, and for a moment they had stood face to face, without the intervention of any artificial restraint or barrier, in the simple naturalness of a confessed, though silent, mutual understanding. No matter what differences might arise between them hereafter, the remembrance of this hour would remain. As they walked thoughtfully on together Virginia wondered at her own temerity in ever daring to question or mock at the opinions of the grave-faced man at her side, who had the power to lead others through life's most solemn trial with a calm sense of safety and triumph. He, on the other hand, if he remembered her little mockeries at all, thought of them only as of the glitter of an insect's wing when it poises itself in a moment of harmless vanity in the air, and then

floats silently away. Virginia was, to do them both justice, something more than an insect, though Howard owned no necessity for exact scientific classification of any woman of his acquaintance, being content to estimate them by the effect they produced on his emotions, as one calculates the merit of a picture or other work of art. Though Virginia was strongly opposed in theory to any such tests or standards, she could not change her nature nor cease trying to impress others with a hundred little, illusory effects that bore no more essential relation to her real character than the butterfly's spots do to its particular form of insect anatomy.

After this Virginia tried to look on it as the most natural thing in the world when she met her clerical friend in any of the places where her new duties took her. It was often easy to ascribe these meetings to accident, but as often an alarmed instinct told her better. A growing frankness was beginning to show in her companion's manner, a masculine heedlessness of the proprieties and true demands of the situation, which Virginia often found as trying to her nerves as it was flattering to her self-love. Her favorite visiting place was at Mother Coles's, — a sweet-faced old lady, whom illness and the desertion of her relatives had left in a dependent condition. Her gentle spirit had not been overborne by misfortune, and there was a

peaceful atmosphere in her little room that made an hour's companionship with her worth more than many a sermon, and Virginia told Hester that she always got more than she gave when she went to see Mother Coles.

She had been sitting with her one afternoon until a late hour, and had risen from her chair to come away, when Chase Howard entered. The old lady's face brightened with pleasure, for he was one of her favorites; but he glanced towards her other visitor, and, seeing that she was about to go, refused to sit down, saying that he had only run in in passing, and had not meant to stop, then bidding her good-by and coming out with Virginia.

"Why did you do that?" she exclaimed, as the door closed behind them. "How could you disappoint her so? Is that the way for a minister to behave?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, in surprise. "She didn't expect me to stay. It isn't her day, any way; I always go there Fridays."

"Then why did you go in at all?" she asked, rather sharply.

"I thought I might find you there."

This was divine candor, but it did not appear to appease his companion. "Her day!" she repeated. "What a heartless way of talking! I am sick of charity. I shall tell Hester she must attend to her work herself after this."

"Then Mother Coles will be more disappointed than ever," he said, in a concerned tone. "She thinks more of having you come to see her than she does of having me."

"She well may," retorted Virginia; "I at least treat her as if she were a human being, and not a mere 'case,' like a prison convict, marked with a badge and a number."

"I hope I'm not quite so bad as that. It's getting dark, and I didn't want you to walk home alone." But that, Virginia informed him, with the same asperity, was no excuse.

"Perhaps not," he said; "but I've got through making excuses as far as you are concerned."

This was one of a number of speeches he had let fall of late, carelessly, but with a hint of significance in his manner that made her heart beat. She walked on a little faster.

"Why do you never come to hear me preach?" he asked abruptly, a moment after.

She began to feel more at her ease, slackening her pace and speaking in her usual tone, as she made some commonplace excuse. "Why should I come?" she added, with a teasing accent. "I don't believe in the apostolic succession."

"You don't know what you do believe," he replied; "but," in a changed tone, "if you mean that you do not believe in me, or think much of my preaching, you're right enough there, though

you ought not to judge the church by one unworthy disciple."

There was a humble sound to the words, though the speaker's manner failed to match it. Even an affected humility, in the man she has learned to trust, either as friend or lover, has its influence on a woman; his measure of strength and wisdom being associated in her mind with the forces of the universe at large, so that any hint of weakness or self-distrust on his part becomes the sign of a defect in the general fabric. Then the maternal instinct, the desire to comfort and protect, is always strong in women, and finds expression in every relation; and a man can resort to no more clever device for reinstating himself in the good opinion of the woman he cares for than that of mild self-abuse.

Virginia set to work at once to restore her companion to his usual level of self-confidence. She did not think he preached so badly; and, yes, she would make an effort — persuade Hester to do without her usual reading next Sunday, and come to hear him. It would be her last, as she was going home next week.

"Going home?" he cried, in dismay.

She must go sometime, she replied. She had already stayed longer than she intended. There was her own house to attend to, which she had left in the charge of servants, with everything

going to rack and ruin, probably, in the tone of comfortable resignation women employ when engaged on such themes.

"No woman has any business to live like that — alone, and with no one but servants to take care of her," growled Howard.

"Oh, I know what you would like to do with us: put us in a tower and give us a piece of tapestry to sew on!"

"Even that would do no good," was the discouraged response. Then, after a moment's silence, "You prize your independence very much?"

"Of course; why not?"

"You like being known and talked about as the accomplished and eccentric Miss Fairfax; to have your name at the head of subscriptions; to get up petitions and give receptions to a lot of reformers and fanatical upstarts, — you like all that?"

They had reached the gate and she passed inside, turning and looking up at him with smiling effrontery.

"It is the breath of life to me," she said.

"Humph! And the life of other women, who love their husbands and children, and never went to a club or committee meeting, that you despise?"

"You mustn't think I blame them, poor things!"

"Blame them? Good Heavens, I should think not. I tell you such women are the noblest on earth — fit for saints and " —

"And you would like to assist at their canonization? That ought to make them perfectly satisfied, — as I am. Good-night!" turning towards the door.

"Wait a moment; are you angry?" To disprove this charge she turned slowly towards him again. He held out his hand, and, after hesitating a moment, she placed hers in it.

"Shall I tell you what I really think of you?" he asked, keeping it in his, and bending a penetrating look on her through the darkness.

"Not to-night," was the hurried reply. "These few little complimentary remarks you have thrown out are all I can bear for the present," speaking lightly and withdrawing her hand.

"Very well, then, the next time we meet," in a voice that carried a peculiar threat along with it, so that Virginia was afraid to hear more, and gladly beat a retreat into the house.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PEOPLE'S CHURCH.

ARTHUR FORBES returned home at the end of the year, stopping to pay only a short visit to his sister, and then setting out on a journey to one of the Western States, where he had accepted a position in the liberal ministry. His friend, Tom Fletcher, had procured the place for him. The former had shortly before visited Elk Rapids, for business purposes, where he learned from his new acquaintance, Judge Hunt, the chief citizen of the town, and a noted free-thinker, of the pastorless condition of the People's Church, the democratic title bestowed by a small band of radical thinkers on their place of meeting.

Elk Rapids was a smart, thriving town on one of the tributaries of the Mississippi, deriving its name from the rapid descent which the river makes at this point through a rocky pass, where its waters are converted, for the space of half a mile, into a swift, boiling current that affords a picturesque resort to tourists, but renders all kinds of boating dangerous.

The population of the town was of that mixed

but enterprising character which marks the frontier community, though most of the signs of pioneer life had disappeared, Elk Rapids having reached that degree of size and importance which caused the inhabitants to rest secure in the belief that their little city was destined to surpass Denver and Minneapolis as a centre for the trading interests of the West, and eventually to rival Chicago itself.

Judge Hunt was a prominent lawyer in the State, who had served several terms in the Circuit Court, and whose honorary title still clung to him, according to the fashion of a republic-loving people.

He had shaken the ancient soil of New England from his feet when he was a young man. With no capital but a few law-books and his Yankee brawn and sharpness he had come West, moving by gradual stages nearer to the setting sun until he reached Elk Rapids, then the mere beginning of a town, where he invested all his ready cash, and assumed the rôle of a public-spirited citizen. In recognition of his well-known ability he had received various civic and political honors, having held the office of mayor of the little city a number of terms, and, after his labors on the bench had expired, sitting a term or two in the State Legislature, besides having been offered the candidacy for member of Congress. Judge Hunt

was justly proud of the town he had helped to build, and of his own position in it; proud of his good name and of the numerous honors he had received, in spite of the fact, as he was wont to boast, that he had truckled to no man, and never yielded an inch of his honest opinion. People might call him an infidel; — he, himself, accepted the term as one of proud distinction; — but he defied them to point to a spot on his character, and he took open satisfaction in the knowledge that his word was better than the bond of many of his fellow-townsmen who lived in the odor of sanctity, and whose views on inspiration were of recognized soundness.

The judge's free-thinking was of a type that abounds in our day, where pride of intellect and devotion to a high, but narrow, ideal usurp the whole domain of thought and feeling in the discussion of questions whose settlement requires the combined action of reason, a cultured understanding, and that fine, acquired sense, known as historic imagination. The judge had no imagination, historic or of any other kind, nor was he, outside of his profession, a man of wide learning, though a voracious reader of a certain class of books. He was a great admirer of Confucius and similar writers, and belonged to that class of liberals who hold the story of the flood, as related in Genesis, in open contempt until, finding

record of the same in the Chinese and other Scriptures, they incline to modify this opinion, and think there may be something in it.

In his social and domestic relations the judge was universally loved and honored. At home he was the indulgent father of five children, and the affectionate husband of a wife who idolized him, and was in the habit of classing him in her mind with Galileo, and Theodore Parker, and other apostles of intellectual freedom.

Tom wrote to Arthur: —

> Mrs. Hunt is a motherly old lady, immersed in family cares and labors for the undeserving poor, in which last you are sure to come in for more than your share. The children are all of the brainy order, like their father, and the three sons are in business here. The oldest daughter is away at school, but I have given my heart away to her photograph. When she is here she plays the organ and leads the choir, and I should feel that my chance was gone already did I not know that the judge would never consent to a minister for a son-in-law. They mean to take you into the family until you can look about and find the place you want, and I cannot help regarding this as another circumstance in my favor. Well, old boy, may you be happy and win golden opinions for yourself, all of which will reflect a gilded lustre on me. Don't argue too much with the judge. I have assured him you are a tremendous radical, and all right; but I own to a cowardly silence on other points, and have neglected to explain that, in spite of your rejection of the trinity, you are as much of a religious dreamer and mystic as Fenelon himself. The Judge wouldn't have thought much of Fenelon, and he will not

think much of you except as you bring the practical side of your nature to meet his, and until, like the rest of us, he learns to know you, and to overlook your eccentricities in view of minor and less objectionable traits.

He will be sure to scoff at your new service, and pin you to the wall with an argument about the dependence of mind on matter; but he will stand by you, for he is the founder of the church, and all his pride, as fierce and obstinate as a Turk's, is enlisted in the enterprise.

Some more business, connected with what my impatient client calls "this infernal lawsuit," will bring me out here again before long, and I will give the rest of my instructions then.

N.B.— I stole the photograph, which is a sign that I am hard hit, and that, in the language of these Occidents, I have preëmpted my claim. The damages for trespass in this region are very heavy.

Your friend and mentor,

Tom.

Arthur entered upon his new labors with a tact and intelligence that bespoke instinctive knowledge of the situation and went far to compensate for the lack of actual experience. The little society prospered and grew under his charge; but Arthur did not allow himself to be misled by these signs of early success. He knew that he had allied himself to an unpopular cause, upheld by a shifting and uncertain constituency. The suffrages of the average congregation are easily won and easily lost, and he soon learned that breadth of sympathy is not a necessary adjunct of breadth of view. Though he had been well received, and was made the

subject of constant friendly attentions, he felt companionless and alone, and labored under the depressing knowledge that scarcely one among those with whom he had cast in his lot understood and sympathized with his real purpose. Parts of himself he caught reflected in nearly every member of his congregation; but it was as one catches a partial and distorted image of one's self in a broken mirror, while the deep content and sense of strength continually renewed, which comes from seeing our inmost thought and desire repeated in another mind, he never felt. That had been possible with only one, he sadly reflected, and, that possibility destroyed, he was doomed to perpetual spiritual loneliness.

His new acquaintances knew but little of Arthur's personal history, and a slight air of mystery hung over him. It was known that he had an older sister, with whom he corresponded regularly, and whose portrait hung above his study mantel; that he had studied at first for the orthodox ministry, changing his views during the latter part of the course in favor of the doctrines he now taught, facts of an unexciting order, on which the wildest imagination could not speculate long.

As a single man his behavior and general habits were subjected to a curious scrutiny they would not otherwise have received; opinion being divided among the members of his society as to whether

it was an advantage to have an unmarried minister or not. Those who inclined to the negative of this question looked to see Arthur speedily married, and many thought he could not do better than to marry Lucy Hunt, who had returned home, and was one of his most active assistants in the church; and who, with sufficient grace and intelligence to fit her for the position, combined a yielding disposition that would never bring her into conflict with other members of influence. But there was an absent-minded melancholy about the young minister and a reticence of manner which gave rise to another sort of conjecture, and confirmed the suspicion that he had a heart-history of his own, and that, in this respect, his fate was already settled.

Though Judge Hunt, as Tom Fletcher had explained to Arthur, was the most prominent member of the church, he by no means monopolized its whole opinion and influence, and, like every minister, Arthur felt himself continually drawn in opposite directions by the varying views and tendencies of his congregation. Mrs. Hendricks, the descendant of a long line of Universalists, represented the conservative element in the society, as Judge Hunt proudly stood for the radical. As Tom had predicted, the latter had been prompt to inform Arthur that the only part of the Sunday exercises he cared about was the sermon, and that he liked that better when it took the form of a

lecture on some useful topic, like free trade or evolution. He took the liberty of staying away from church whenever he liked, but was always on hand at the business meetings, and gave the movement every practical aid and encouragement. Mrs. Hendricks, on the other side, was charmed with the service, without which, she declared, her emotional nature would be quite starved, but pronounced most of the sermons beyond mortal understanding.

"Call that a sermon!" she said, in her energetic fashion, as she walked home from church one morning with Mrs. Hunt and Lucy. "There wasn't a word about God or the Bible in it." Arthur's discourse had been rather abstractly designated in the title as "The Divine Immanence in Things Natural."

"Why," Lucy Hunt replied, in a voice of soft astonishment, "I thought it was full of — God." She had never been trained to any form of reverent speech or custom, but her voice insensibly sank at the last word.

"There, now," exclaimed Mrs. Hendricks, in complete discouragement. "That is just the way different people look at things. I say a sermon should be one thing or the other; then you can tell whether a man really believes anything or not."

Mrs. Hunt had not much of an opinion to offer.

She had not listened very closely, her attention being diverted by the thought that she could not have the sewing society at her house that week if the plasterers were coming. She did not trouble herself to form definite views on this class of subjects, being content to let her husband do that for her. She had noticed some remote allusion to Marcus Aurelius, and had thought the judge would have been pleased with that, and that it was a pity he had not come; but he had chosen to stay at home that morning with his newspaper.

"Well, I don't mean to complain," Mrs. Hendricks began again, in a more amiable tone, "and I will say that his prayer was beautiful. You would think he was a very religious young man to hear him pray."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Hunt, who, on this point, where she understood her husband's views so well, felt bound to express a reflected opinion; "I don't see the use of liberals using all those hymns and Scripture readings; and as for the prayer — if things are governed by law" —

"Oh, I'm tired of law!" her companion exclaimed. "I'm getting so I fairly envy people who believe in a miracle or two."

Mrs. Hunt was quite shocked. "Well, I can't agree with you there. People should use their

reason, the judge says; and that is what I think, too."

"Reason," repeated the other, with a little sniff of contempt. "Some folks have too much reason;" to which Mrs. Hunt replied with some warmth, for she felt that these words were meant to bear a personal application, that most folks hadn't enough.

Lucy interposed here, in her quiet manner, to say that she liked the service very much, especially the hymns; and that she thought the choir had improved.

"That is because you and Mr. Forbes drill them so well," said Mrs. Hendricks, with a little innuendo. "He says he doesn't know what he would do without you."

"Did he say that?" Lucy asked, turning a look of innocent pleasure on the other. "I am so glad I can be of use;" but Mrs. Hunt had noticed the insinuating tone, and was glad they had reached their gate.

"That Lucy Hunt is the most artful young woman I know," said Mrs. Hendricks to herself, as she walked on alone; "or the most innocent, I don't know which," in repentant after-thought, as she remembered the numerous acts of kindness she, in common with every one who came within range of the young girl's acquaintance, had received at her hands.

The winter passed, and the season of Easter was at hand, when Arthur, seated at work in his study late one Saturday afternoon, heard a knock at the door, and, rising to open it, stood face to face with Tom Fletcher. There was an exclamation of surprise, followed by hearty greetings on each side, while Tom explained his presence on the ever ready plea of business, resisting his friend's entreaties to sit down, saying that he had an engagement to meet before supper.

"Then you must come round this evening," said Arthur. "No, you cannot, either," in half-vexed remembrance, —"I have to go to choir-meeting."

"Never mind," said Tom, in his cheerful tone; "I will drop in and go to church with you in the morning. I suppose I shall have to hear you preach."

Arthur explained that the regular exercises were to be suspended, as it was Easter, and they were to have a special service, in which the children were to take part.

"Easter!" exclaimed Tom, in mock dismay. "What's a young radical like you to do with Easter? 'What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?'"

"Oh, come, now!" said Arthur; "you are not so ignorant as all that. You know as well as I do that the Easter festival antedates Christianity by

hundreds of years, and was part of every ancient worship. It is as a symbol of natural and universal religion that I use it."

"Um-m, I see," the other replied. "A revival of the old Teutonic ceremony — a celebration of the vernal equinox — not Easter, but Ostera."

"Call it what you please," said Arthur, good-humoredly; "only come along and see how you like it."

Tom presented himself promptly at the study the next morning, and accompanied Arthur to church. The latter gave his friend in charge of one of the ushers, going himself around to a side entrance that led to the pulpit. Seated in the pew, Tom looked about him with kindly, but amused, scrutiny. The church was decorated with green branches and flowering plants, vases of flowers ornamenting the pulpit, in front of which stood a tall, flowering shrub, with a butterfly poised on the topmost spray. Rows of bright-faced children, with their attendant teachers, occupied the front rows of seats, and a group of singers sat near the small cabinet organ at one end of the platform. Among the last to enter was a young woman, dressed in gray, who ascended the platform and seated herself at the organ. Tom felt a new interest in the proceedings, though he silently condemned the custom which compels the organist to sit with her back to the

congregation. A buzz of whispered conversation and the rustle of fresh garments fill the room, sinking into a decorous silence as the minister entered.

Tom watched his friend intently, and with growing approval, seeing that he was in the right place. The constrained and rather diffident manner which Arthur wore elsewhere disappeared entirely in the pulpit, and he spoke with quiet ease and composure, in a voice finely inflected to the different shades of feeling, and containing, at times, the ring of a true eloquence.

The services consisted of a simple arrangement of hymns and responsive readings, including a prayer and an anthem by the choir. This was followed by a short address to the children, in which, taking the butterfly for his theme, he explained its three stages, of worm, chrysalis, and winged insect, and told them the story of Psyche, as it bore on the day's lesson of immortality. Then the children relieved their tired limbs in a marching exercise about the room, to the accompaniment of the organ, after which came the singing of another hymn and dismissal.

Tom stood waiting a long time in his pew after the exercises had closed, and all the congregation had departed except the minister and organist, who stood together near the platform, consulting about the disposal of the flowers. It was evident

that Arthur had forgotten all about his friend, and it was Lucy Hunt, always thoughtful and observant, who first noticed the stranger.

"Excuse me, sir," she said, interrupting Arthur, and speaking in the respectful manner in which she always addressed him; "but I think some one is waiting to speak to you."

Arthur turned. "Why, that's Tom Fletcher," he said, leading the way to his friend, who came down the aisle to meet him, and presenting him to Miss Hunt.

"You have given us a very pretty service," said Tom to the latter. "It is quite unique, and purely original with my friend Forbes, I fancy," casting a mischievous glance in Arthur's direction; but the latter was busy talking with the janitor and did not hear.

"It could not very well help being pretty with the flowers and the children," said Lucy. Tom thought this a rather artless reply. He could not recall any of the more sophisticated young women of his city acquaintance who would have contented herself with so simple a remark. Two little girls came running in from the vestibule just then, and stood clinging to her skirts, looking shyly up at the stranger. Tom looked to see her stoop down and kiss them, thus arranging an effective little tableau for his benefit; that is what the more sophisticated young women would

have done; but this one did not seem to think of it, leading them by the hand as they all went slowly down the aisle together.

"They got along better with the anthem than I thought they would, Miss Lucy," said Arthur.

"Yes, sir; Mr. Smith said he sat up until midnight practising his part." Arthur expressed his satisfaction at this evidence of good-will on the part of his leading tenor.

"Calls her by her given name," Tom ruminated to himself as he followed on behind; "but what does she mean by addressing him as 'sir'?"

It had been cloudy all the morning, and when they reached the door it was raining; but, while they stood under the little porch hesitating what to do, George Hunt came running up the steps with water-proofs and umbrellas. He knew Tom, greeting him cordially, and walking by his side down the street, leaving his sister, after she had seen her young charges started safely in the right direction, to follow with Arthur. They separated at the first corner, Arthur declining young Hunt's invitation to go home with him to dinner, wishing to have Tom to himself, and promising to call with him in the evening.

"Where did you meet Mr. Fletcher, George?" his sister asked, as they went on together.

"Oh! he came to me to help him out on some law business," with an important air. "He's a

splendid fellow; got a rushing practice in Chicago," and the young man sighed. It was the darling wish of his heart to go to the city. His sister knew this, and pressed his arm sympathetically.

"But you are getting a good start, too, aren't you? And father says he is willing you should go to a larger place after a while."

"Yes, but he is talking now of giving up his practice, and throwing it into my hands. In that case I should do better to stay here; but I shall not like staying, for all that."

"Shan't you?" with sisterly concern. "That is a pity. Now, I like living at the Rapids."

"But you wouldn't if you were a man, and had a future to make;" at which she looked thoughtful and said, "Perhaps not."

"Perhaps Mr. Fletcher can help you," she added, a moment after.

"I mean to sound him a little," was the crafty reply; "but mind you don't say anything about it, Lucy;" and she promised, being in the same confidential relation on some point with every member of the family.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNDAY AT JUDGE HUNT'S.

IT was a pleasant domestic scene when the Hunt family gathered about the long table for Sunday dinner. The judge, white-haired, and with his usual expression of shrewd benevolence, sat at one end, and his wife, with matronly figure, and a ruddy glow on her cheeks, like the color of a ripe apple, sat opposite. There were intervening seats for three on each side, the high chair on the mother's left being occupied by a little girl of four years, a motherless niece of Mrs. Hunt's, whom she had taken into her own family.

Judge Hunt prided himself on the way in which he had brought up his five children, giving to each a good education, and grounding them in the principles of a sound morality. It was a matter of especial pride with him that he had never sought to influence any of them in their religious beliefs. He was rewarded by living to see each of the five adopt opinions and a rule of practice on these questions quite independent of all the rest. Morton, the second son, had reached his majority in a condition of weary indifference to all

questions of religious controversy, turning his back on the church and everything pertaining to it, and resorting for the solace of a moody and rather cynical temperament to his violin, which he played with touching grace and skill, drawing wild, plaintive melodies from its four strings that gave rise to a delicious pain in the hearts of those who listened, repeating, but never quieting, the restless feeling in his own. His most intimate friend was his music-teacher, a cultured and seedy German, who had the national capacity for beer, tobacco, and metaphysics, having gone through all the philosophic systems of his learned countrymen and rejected each in turn.

The eldest son, George, who was of a practical bent, had inherited a softened version of his father's views, along with the latter's taste for the law, and had adopted a modified liberalism for his creed, reading Darwin and John Fiske, and being an active supporter of Arthur Forbes. The third son, Daniel, junior partner in a flourishing dry-goods store, had made early profession of a very different faith, and formally united with the Baptist church. There was reason to suspect that the judge was prouder of the orthodox connections of his younger son than of the combined scepticism of the rest of the family, it served so well to illustrate his peculiar system.

The rest of the family were seated at the table

when Morton, who had been practising all the morning in his room, came down and took his place.

"Well, old man," said George, in half-jesting remonstrance, "I hope you'll get that strain sometime. I counted it twenty-seven times while I was trying to read a page."

He had stayed at home from church that morning to read a new essay of Huxley's, copying his father's example here as elsewhere, and felt ill used.

"Dear me!" his brother replied, pettishly; "I think I'll fit up a room over Dan's store, or in the barn, where I can have a little peace."

"Can't have you over the store, Mort," said Dan, a good-looking young fellow, who employed a fashionable tailor. "Can't afford to risk custom that way."

"You can practise in my room, dear," said Lucy, turning to the abused musician. "You will not be disturbed there."

"He will not be disturbed," cried George; "that's one way of putting it."

"It's Lucy's way," said Dan. "I wish you would sit down, Lucy," he added, in a discontented tone, to his sister, who was moving about the table to serve the others. "Where's Maria? That's her work." Dan was one who liked to have things done in order.

"She wants to visit her sister this afternoon, and it is so far that I told her she might go on with her work in the kitchen," looking apologetically across at her brother, and then retiring a moment into the pantry.

Dan was not satisfied with this explanation. "I declare it's a shame the way this family make Lucy wait on them," he said, when she was out of hearing.

"Why, then, did you keep her so long this morning looking for your gloves? She came near being late to church." This from his youngest sister, who sat next to him, and was still in the school-girl stage of short skirts and braided hair.

"That's because she's the only one who knows where anything is," was the unabashed reply. "You hurry and grow up, sis, and I'll ask you."

Lucy came back now, and took her place by her father.

"Did you have a good sermon, Lucy?" he asked.

She replied that there had been no sermon, and described the morning's exercises. "The children did nicely, and were very good," she said, in conclusion.

"Tarrie was dood, too," interposed an infantine voice farther down the table. "Tarrie was ze bes' of all."

"Oh, but Carrie shouldn't say that!" her cousin said, in gentle reproof, which the little one did not seem to heed, turning to her aunt with a peremptory demand for another pickled peach. This was refused, and the young lady began to express her resentment by pounding the table with her fists and kicking it with her feet.

"Carrie isn't good now," said her aunt, rebukingly. The child paused, and looked at her a moment as if to consider this charge.

"Tarrie's tired being dood; Tarrie doesn't tare 'tis Sunny — Tarrie's doin' be des naughty 'zanny uzzer day."

This tickled the judge, who leaned back in his chair and laughed, and the child, thus encouraged, redoubled her noise.

"See here, young lady," said Dan, with pretended fierceness, "do you want to be taken upstairs, where there's a wicked fairy, who punishes little girls who don't behave?"

"Don't talk to her like that, Dan," said his mother, in a low voice. The little girl had stopped her noisy demonstrations for the moment to look at her older relative with an expression of cunning mistrust.

"Zey aint no fairies, — nuncle says so."

"Does Carrie want to go upstairs to Lucy's room, and see the pretty pictures?" her cousin asked, in a tone that suited her different mode of

argument. The little girl's face brightened in assent to this proposal.

"Then Carrie must be good, and not make any more noise," looking at her with a kind, but steady gaze, which the child returned for a moment, then sat up in her place, and finished her meal in quiet.

"You haven't said how you liked the service," Arthur said to his friend, when they had reached his boarding-place and entered the study.

"For a pretty piece of revived paganism it did very well," the other replied. "It was graceful and effective, and not particularly irreligious. The march reminded me of the pan-Athenaic procession among the ancient Greeks," speaking as though he had been eye-witness to both. "I don't believe it will do the children any harm, though it may puzzle the understanding of their elders; but," dropping his tone, and placing his hands on the other's shoulders, "the question is, how you like it? Very much, I suspect."

"I do, indeed," Arthur replied, with earnest and glowing face. "I love my work, and believe in it. Every day increases the conviction that I have made the right choice." He spoke in a tone of unusual hopefulness and courage, the effect of the morning's exercises; but, even as his friend continued to look at him, a perceptible change passed over his face, and he turned away with a repressed sigh. "I should have nothing to regret," he added,

in a low voice, "if" — and he left the sentence unfinished. Tom understood, but said nothing, seating himself in a large chair, and stooping to raise to his lap a Maltese cat that came up and began rubbing itself against his leg.

Arthur placed himself in a seat opposite, and looked at him with sad attentiveness, which Tom shielded himself against by studiously pulling the cat's furry ears.

"You have been to Dennison?" Arthur said at length.

"Yes," Tom lightly replied; "I was passing through, and stopped over one train. As your guardian, I felt I ought to pay a visit to your sister. We sat up till midnight discussing the knotty points in your character; but I shall not tell you what conclusion we reached."

"I don't care what it was," Arthur replied, with a touch of his old impatience. He was anxiously waiting to hear a word on another topic; but, though Tom noted this anxiety and understood its cause, he did nothing to relieve it, skirting lightly near and away from the dangerous subject, as he considered it, while he continued the account of his visit; as a dexterous skater skims fleetly along the edge of a dangerous air-hole, but never loses himself in it.

Arthur soon came to understand the wilful nature of this silence, and his pride prevented the

escape of any further hint of his desire. Forcing back his disappointment, he allowed Tom to lead the conversation where he chose; while the arrival of the dinner-hour and a series of calls on the minister during the afternoon kept the talk in safe channels until nightfall. It was Tom who reminded Arthur of their promised visit, and he thought he had never seen a more attractive picture of home comfort and cheer than that which was presented in the Hunts' sitting-room when they entered.

The judge sat in the easy-chair in the centre of the room, reading his beloved newspaper; and his wife, near by, with her little niece in her lap, who was listening to a bedtime story of "Puss in Boots." Lucy and her brother were playing a duet at the farther end of the room, where the piano stood. Dan had gone to church; and his younger sister sat apart by herself, studying the next day's lessons. It was George Hunt who had answered their ring at the door.

The musicians stopped playing as the visitors entered, Morton laying down his violin and retiring to a corner; while Lucy came forward to join her greeting with the rest. There was a shade of embarrassment in her manner as she spoke to Arthur, which seemed copied in his; but which nobody, except Tom, noticed. Arthur seemed to try, however, to make himself at home; insisting

that the music which they had interrupted should be renewed, and remaining at the piano after the duet was finished to talk with the accompanist about the musical services of the morning and kindred themes, for what seemed to Tom a very unreasonable length of time. As the latter sat in his place and replied to the remarks of the judge, with the older son sitting near and dropping a word now and then, he could catch fragments of the conversation at the other end of the room; together with a few occasional notes and chords, with which the speakers seemed to illustrate their talk. He noticed that the violinist had put aside his instrument, and stood leaning idly against the piano, paying little heed to a discussion which did not seem to include him; and he wondered how long this sort of thing was going to continue, when the conference broke up, the minister and his companion coming forward and seating themselves near the others.

Mrs. Hunt, who had left the room shortly before to put the child to bed, now returned, bearing a hospitable tray in her hands, containing a large pitcher of cider, with its attendant glasses, and a dish of apples, which she proceeded to serve.

Arthur declined the cider, and the judge noticing this, as he emptied his own glass, looked at him with a humorous frown, and declared that

that was carrying things a little too far, and that a little cider could hurt no one. "I am a temperance man myself, but temperance is one thing; and all this cant about total abstinence and prohibition is another."

Arthur admitted that there was a good deal of illogical reasoning on his side; "but I don't know," he added, hesitatingly, "I imagine a good cause has often to rest itself on something besides bare logic." Here the judge interrupted him to say that "bare logic," as he called it, was good enough for him.

"There are other necessities," Arthur continued, without heeding this, "connected with the natural feelings and sentiments, that must be taken into account. In this case I imagine it is the feelings of the upper classes — the wealthy and cultivated people — that must give way. They are in the least danger, and naturally opposed to measures which deprive them of privileges they can enjoy with perfect safety; but no one class has a right to enjoy a privilege which the entire community cannot indulge in as harmlessly."

"That's downright despotism," said the judge. "You might as well tell me I have no right to eat meat because my neighbor has a weak stomach. I know that was Paul's doctrine, but Paul is nothing to me. Because Johnny Gibbs — a confirmed drunkard of the town — can't smell of

liquor without going on a spree is no reason why I should deprive myself of my glass of toddy, if I want it."

"But, husband, you know you don't care anything about it," his wife interposed, with a concerned look on her motherly face and a little disturbed for the family credit.

"Precisely, my dear; I said if I wanted it."

Arthur answered to this, adopting his opponent's premise, but reversing his conclusion, that just because of Johnny Gibbs's weakness the judge had no right to make a boastful display of his own strength, though not in those words. "You would not take your glass of toddy in Johnny Gibbs's presence," he concluded.

"No of course, he would not," his wife hastened to reply. The judge had removed his spectacles, wiping them with a complacent smile, while indulging the others in their share of the argument.

"Now, I hold," Arthur went on with increasing earnestness, "that we should carry this sense of personal responsibility into every act of our lives. In no other way can a correct and unfailing habit be formed. If I permit myself to drink wine when alone, or in what I think the right company, I shall, sooner or later, lose my reckoning, and drink it in the wrong company. My example can count for nothing unless I am as strict with myself as with

others. Setting aside all question of principle, and looking at the matter simply from the point of a higher expediency, we should follow this course."

"That's all any principle is, — a higher expediency," said the judge.

"I am not certain of that," was the reply. "We may accept that view theoretically perhaps, but should be careful to act on the opposite.

Tom laughed aloud at this, and declared it a happy bit of self-characterization, telling the judge what he had formerly told Arthur himself, that his friend was a singular mixture of contrary tendencies, rational and superstitious.

"All this talk about the force of example is well enough," the judge began again; "but if you want an example look at my boys," straightening himself and preparing to dilate on his favorite theme. "I have always kept wine in my house, and I didn't label it 'Poison' either. All I said was, 'That's wine, boys; something that has its use in the world and its abuse; a man may drink a glass of wine now and then and conduct himself like an honorable man and a gentleman, or he may make a brute and a fool of himself; but don't think, if you do the last, the fault is in the wine. The fault is in you;' and what is the result?" He waved his hand, as if modestly forbearing to go into that part of the subject.

"The result is unanswerable, of course, and all that could be desired," his eldest son replied, with mock gravity. "My father's children are quite an exceptional variety, you will understand," turning to Tom; and the latter, looking in the direction of the one who sat near her mother, said he didn't doubt it. At the same moment Lucy, who had not before spoken, leaned forward with an earnest look on her face.

"But, papa"—

"Well, pussy, what is it?"

She drew back, flushing a little, not quite liking to be called "pussy" before a stranger, and embarrassed to find herself the centre of observation.

"It's only this, papa,—you know that even if we did have the wine in the house mamma always kept it locked up, and would never let us have any unless we were ill."

The judge looked a little disconcerted at this, and there was a general laugh at his expense.

"Never mind," he said, when it had subsided, with a teasing glance at his wife, who was more discomposed over this disclosure than he was; "I am not the only man who has been beaten by feminine artifice."

It was growing late, and the visitors rose to go. "But can't we have a song first?" Arthur asked, turning to Lucy.

"Yes, yes," the judge said; "give us a song.

Get your fiddle, my boy," careful that his sensitive child should not be overlooked, and the young people gathered about the piano.

"What shall we sing?" Lucy asked, turning on her stool. Her eyes fell by chance on Tom, as she put this question, and he allowed them to rest there a moment before he replied, with what seemed to him a bold suggestiveness, "Home, Sweet Home."

The judge promptly seconded this choice, and joined in the chorus, with a hearty, if not most tuneful, bass, beating time with his slippered foot on the floor.

"What a delightful family!" said Tom, when he and Arthur had reached the street.

"They are the best people in the world," the other replied. "I should have been dull and lonesome enough when I first came without them. The judge has some queer notions, and likes to think of himself as a tearing radical; but he has the kindest heart I know, and there is no man more respected than he is.

"And Miss Hunt, — she's a great help to you, too, I suppose?"

It was impossible that Arthur should not notice the slight tone of insinuation with which this question was put, and it annoyed him the more that it reflected certain accusing thoughts of his own. His manner changed, and he made a brief

and cold reply to the effect that Miss Hunt was naturally interested in the work of the church established by her father. Tom took the hint and changed the subject. He felt ill at ease, both with himself and his friend, and declined Arthur's not very urgent invitation to accompany him home, bidding him good-night and going on to his hotel. He said to himself that he had been over-careful of his friend's feelings in his persistent avoidance of a certain subject, and he even began to cherish a slight resentment on behalf of a young woman whom he had hitherto left to her own defence. It now looked as if the cure which he wished to see established in his friend's disappointed affections might effect itself without aid from him, and, though he could have wished the means had proved somewhat different, every consideration of friendship and honorable manhood compelled him to stand aside and place no obstacle, in the shape of any wish or desire of his own, in the way of Arthur's returning happiness.

CHAPTER XIV.

DRIFTING.

LUCY HUNT'S active interest in the church was not to be entirely explained, as Arthur had told Tom, by a dutiful desire to carry out her father's wishes; but rather dated from the advent of the new minister, which took place about the time of her return from school. She was not the only one who had caught fresh inspiration from the new methods of work adopted by the lately-installed pastor. Arthur's predecessors had, for the most part, measured the duties of their office by their pulpit labors, using the Sunday-morning discourse to fulminate against the errors of orthodoxy, or to establish some new social or scientific theory; so that the weekly exercises at the People's church were defined by outside critics in such terms as, "The Sunday Lectureship;" or, in ironical reflection on its chief member, "Judge Hunt's Debating Society." After Arthur's arrival the judge seemed inclined to forego that preponderating influence which he had exercised over the affairs of the society. He had reached that point of advancing years when active cares of all kinds slip easily from the

shoulders, and the burden of leadership is felt more than its honors. He had, moreover, taken a hearty liking to his young friend, and was content he should pursue his own objects in his own way, though he did not pretend to understand nor approve many of his methods and ideas. He tried to excuse that vein of religious sensibility which marked Arthur's character as a taint of theological prejudice remaining over from his early education, which time and association with perfectly emancipated minds like his own would soon remove. Arthur's opponents, watching him from another point of view, held the same theory; and attributed the apostolic zeal and fervor which he brought to his labors to his orthodox training. From whatever source these qualities were derived it was certain the new pastor possessed them in an unusual degree. He had no sooner accepted the pulpit at Elk Rapids than he organized the society into several working divisions, charitable and social, at the same time entering on a system of religious instruction among the young people. There was need of the last. Arthur, accustomed to the careful methods of training in the denomination in which he was reared, was both shocked and mortified at the prevailing ignorance among his present charge concerning the main facts of religious and biblical history, and at once set to work to correct what

he deemed a fundamental error and misfortune. He formed a Bible class, not without some unwilling compliance on the part of those whom it was intended to benefit, and entered on a thorough study of the Old Testament. A few of the young people entered heartily into the new scheme, and among these no one showed a greater liking and aptitude for the work than Lucy Hunt.

The Bible had, until now, been a sealed volume to her: first, through the command laid by her father on all his children in their early years, which forbade them to open its pages except under the direction of an older eye; and, second, through the indifference which such a habit would engender. She now felt, together with a continued delight and wonder in the new treasures of knowledge she was discovering, the greatest gratitude to Arthur for rescuing her from that state of prejudiced ignorance in which she had once dwelt. Her brother George had also joined the class; and they studied and talked over their lessons together, while the judge looked on grumblingly, venting a half-pretended displeasure in satirical remarks and teasing jests.

"Well, Lucy, what are you reading now?" he asked, one day, as he came behind her where she sat with her head bent over the large open volume on the table before her. "Leviticus," he went on, looking over her shoulder. "You are getting

on. Leviticus must be very interesting reading, I should think. 'And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scape-goat;'" and so on, for a verse or two more. "Very interesting, indeed, and so improving!" he repeated in his dryest tone. "I suppose Mr. Forbes makes you commit a verse or two."

"Oh, no, papa!" looking laughingly up at him. "Of course we shall not spend much time on Leviticus," in the discriminating tone of one who had already learned to distinguish between the more and less important parts of what she was reading. "Only enough, Mr. Forbes says, to learn what were the essential and what were the non-essential laws that Moses gave to the Israelites. And, papa, it is interesting. I can't help liking it; and Moses, I admire him so much: he was a real hero, I think."

"So you approve of his slaying the Egyptian, after looking round to see that nobody was watching him, and his killing off the three thousand? Nice hero that is!"

"No, papa, I don't approve of those things; you don't have to approve of them, Mr. Forbes says, and that makes it so much easier. It is just like reading any other kind of history."

"Pooh, there isn't much history in Moses! It's more likely no such man ever lived."

"Yes, papa, Mr. Forbes says that too," eager to prove that her teacher held as liberated views as anybody; "but we have the idea of Moses, you know, and that is what is of real value. It is like the stories of Hercules and William Tell. They help to inspire the world and make it better," still evidently quoting the words of another. "You don't mind my knowing about Hercules, papa?"

"I see," said the judge, in pretended pique, "this young man is to have everything his own way. I'm a crusty old infidel, who is of no more account. You'll be embroidering Scripture texts next and hanging them on the wall. Do you call that being a good daughter?" taking her chin between his thumb and finger, and lifting her face to his.

She colored a little, raising her hand to remove his, and keeping it in hers, as she replied: —

"As though anybody thought you of no account, papa, and I don't believe Mr. Forbes would like the embroidered texts any better than you. I am sure he agrees with you in very many things."

The judge tried to look very indifferent on this point, as he pinched her cheek and turned away. Neither he nor Lucy had noticed the frequent reference she had made to Mr. Forbes and his opinion. The girl who has the good fortune to

be brought up with several brothers, associating with them on equal terms, preserves a natural ease in her relations with young men she vainly seeks to acquire otherwise. The homelike atmosphere of the Hunt household made it the favorite rendezvous of all the young people in town; and from her childhood Lucy had been on much the same terms of sisterly companionship with her brother's friends, constant visitors at the house, as with her brothers themselves, and her parents had come to share her happy unconsciousness. A careful eye would have noted but little difference in her manner towards Arthur Forbes, except a greater deference and respect, prompted by the knowledge of his position, which he did not find disagreeable.

Until Arthur's arrival Lucy's religious belief had been obediently copied from her father's, consisting for the most part of a few intellectual propositions, the main purport of which lay in their denial of somebody else's belief. The religious sentiment, that upward-springing feeling of the heart towards a living ideal of goodness and beauty, had lain dormant except — and the exception is important — as it sought expression in a round of loving services to those about her. This side of her nature was now making its demands felt, raising in her a glad wonder and thankfulness as at the discovery of a new sense.

Her studies helped her. She was learning to admire and reverence where before she had been taught to decry and to condemn. The habit of setting one's self apart from one's neighbors, in denial of their cherished beliefs, has a depressing effect both on the heart and the understanding. It had always been a pain to Lucy Hunt's gentle and affectionate nature to find herself thus set apart, and though the new instruction she was receiving could not teach her how to obliterate such distinctions it explained and reconciled her to them in a manner impossible to her former training.

The historic sense was also slowly waking within her, taking the place of that narrow personal view which had before controlled her judgment. To Arthur, who watched her with that pride a teacher always feels in his best pupil, her understanding seemed to progress in long leaps, or rather like the swift upward movement of a bird winging its way, in widening circles of flight and song, from earth to the free air above.

"I always thought religion was something that made life very hard and uncomfortable, but now I see it is quite different," she said to him one day when he had called to consult her about the next day's hymns, and lingered to talk a little. "Real religion can only make people better and happier;

it is the false notion of religion that makes them unhappy."

Arthur said "yes," in a rather abstracted fashion, opening and shutting a book on the table before which they stood. She cast an uneasy glance at him. Somehow her words sounded more weak and commonplace than the thought she had wished to express promised. She often felt convicted of foolishness in this way, and envied the power of other people to give original expression to their thoughts, while she was able only to express very simple ideas in a very simple way. But this feeling only swept across her mind like a faint shadow, leaving slight impression behind it, for the cares of a self-reflective disposition were not hers; and she was drawn back to her ordinary mood by her interest in the subject they were discussing.

"And the Bible," she went on, — "I never cared anything about it before; I thought it was full of cruelty and wrong teaching; but I see now how mistaken I was. Why, I think it is a wonderful book!"

Arthur agreed, but reminded her that she might have held a different opinion if she had been compelled to accept its teachings as literal truth. She made ready assent to this. "Of course we should study it in the right way," with an artless implication that theirs was the only

right way, that made her listener smile. "We should read it as we do history, and — what is it that writer called it, whose book you loaned me? That reminds me that I ought to have returned it to you; I will get it now." He made haste to disclaim his need of it; but she crossed the room, and, taking the book from one of the shelves of the bookcase, returned with it. "Literature, not dogma," she added; glancing at the title, and changing it to suit her own idea. "That is the way we should look at it. I like that word better than 'history,' don't you? — for, of course, we know that it isn't history. It's literature. I cannot help pitying people who think it is the other thing: just doctrine. They lose so much."

A slow flush rose to Arthur's face at these words; but, summoning his thoughts back from painful remembrances, he replied, with a constrained smile, that he doubted if the people she referred to wanted their pity. She laughed at that, and said she supposed not. "Papa says no one really does believe the old doctrines now, and I think he must be right. I don't see how they can — people of intelligence, I mean.

"Oh, but you are mistaken there!" was the earnest reply. "There are a great many who are sincere in their belief, and as intelligent as anybody else. I was one of them, you know," he

added, in a lighter tone. "I don't think I brought away all the intelligence."

She laughed again, and then bent a look of serious reflection on him. "It seems so strange," she murmured. "And did you really believe all those things?"

"I thought I did."

"Yes, I see," in a relieved tone; "and when you found you did not, how thankful you must have been!"

He did not reply for a moment, standing before her with lowered eyes. "One must always be thankful to escape what he knows to be an error," he said, hesitatingly; "but I — there are other things to be taken into account, generally, in such cases. I was more sorry than glad, I think."

She seemed a little puzzled at this; then a look of new intelligence crept into her eyes, softened by one of pity. "You mean that you left friends behind you, and they blamed you," she said, softly. He did not attempt to answer her.

"Why should they have blamed you, if they knew you were acting honestly?"

"They do not look at things in that way, you know." He turned towards the door, with a movement that seemed to indicate that he wished to close the conversation. She was sensitive enough to notice this, and again felt convicted of a mistake, a careless intrusion upon thoughts and

memories she had no right to share. At the same time a fine, jealous feeling pricked her, such as the wisest of us may feel when we discover our helplessness to serve one we would like to believe has real need of us. Having said so much, she could not stop there, and let fall a few stammering sentences: "I am sorry — I did not know — I should not have spoken as I did."

He turned towards her, glancing at her with troubled eyes a moment, and then withdrawing them. "No — you did right to speak; I am glad you know." Then a deep flush rose to his face, reflected in a faint color in hers; and he moved again towards the door. What his first thought had been was, that if this young woman before him, with the sympathetic voice and eyes, and her power of intelligent coöperation in his work, knew about that other, hundreds of miles away, it would be easy for them to be friends; a specious argument, which he recognized, perhaps, for he made no effort to test it.

"I must go now," he said, and held out his hand, — a more significant action with him than he knew, since he had not that habit of incessant hand-shaking which characterizes his countrymen; but it was not a deliberated one, though it had the same effect to relieve her fears and restore her confidence. For him, he thought little of what he was saying or doing, and if he had asked himself

what it was he felt glad Lucy Hunt knew he would have been compelled to admit it was that she knew nothing; but our unconscious as well as our conscious acts hold us pledged to a certain line of future behavior, and the old impersonal freedom of the relation between Arthur Forbes and his young parishioner was lost. After this each carried the thought of the other about in that veiled subconsciousness which belongs, in its degree, to friendship as to love, since each is a relation of possessor and the object possessed. When the heart is hungry it will not stop always to nicely weigh and balance its right of refreshment at the various sources offering it, and Arthur's heart was undeniably hungry. Without attempting to define or speculate on the nature of this new relation he simply allowed himself to accept and profit by it. Among those with whom he was associated there was no one who understood and sympathized with his real purpose so fully as did Lucy Hunt. Did one of the morning discourses seem to fail of its effect, either in the interest or enlightenment of his hearers, he consoled himself with the thought that it had won her entire appreciation and regard. Did others lend only a half-hearted assistance to his plans, he knew he could rely on her complete aid and sympathy. Thus the repeated necessity of seeking her counsel and support bid fair to grow into a habit, when a slight circumstance

served to arouse him to a knowledge of his position.

Mrs. Henderson, who acted as Sunday-school assistant, came to him one day after Sunday-school in great anxiety. She had lost her most capable teacher, and sought a recruit from the minister's class, three or four of whom stood grouped about his desk in the study as she entered.

"I am in despair," she said, in her usual tone of lively exaggeration. "Miss Bailey was invaluable, but we shall have to give her up. She is going to Denver. We shall never be able to keep the class together without her, though of course we must try." She paused to take breath and to sigh over her misfortunes. "There is no one who can take her place," she went on, running her eyes over the circle of young faces until they found the one she wanted, "unless it is Miss Hunt."

"I!" exclaimed Lucy. "Oh, I couldn't!"

Her companions, signalling each other with an expressive eye-glance, from a like dreaded invitation of their own services, slipped out of the room, leaving the three together.

"You can do it very well, my dear," Mrs. Henderson replied, in that condescending tone an older woman sometimes likes to employ towards a younger in the presence of a gentleman. "I don't say you will be equal to Miss Bailey at first —

they have been with her so long. It is the hardest class in the school," in relentless disregard of the effect of her words. "Girls you know, about sixteen, just that age when they think they are young women, and only come to Sunday-school for the sociability of it any way. I don't say this to discourage you," — noting the growing trouble in Lucy's face, — "only to show you that it is your duty. You are sure to make friends with them in a little while. In fact some of them have said that if they must give up Miss Bailey they would rather have Miss Hunt than any one else."

Lucy smiled feebly and tried to look grateful, glancing timidly towards the minister to learn his opinion. But Arthur's thoughts were occupied with himself. He was trying to put down the struggling emotions of sharp disappointment and surprise which the prospect of Lucy Hunt's leaving the Bible-class had aroused. He was both startled and confused at the strength of the feelings, and the unreasoning dislike of his assistant, which had suddenly taken possession of him. He stood with downcast face, and an air of guilty embarrassment hung over him which Lucy felt certain expressed a strong conviction of her unfitness for the position which had been offered her.

"It is no use to decline," Mrs. Henderson continued. "You must say yes. Tell her she must, Mr. Forbes," turning to this authority. Arthur

raised his eyes and fastened them gravely on his pupil. She looked so anxious and full of dread at the responsibilities about to be thrust on her that Arthur felt sorry for her. He turned to Mrs. Henderson.

"If the young ladies are of the age you say, why not bring them in here? I ought to have a larger class any way."

"Yes," Lucy eagerly put in, catching at this chance of escape; "I am sure that would be much better. They would take it as a promotion, you know."

Mrs. Henderson looked from one to the other with resigned patience. "It would never do in the world. There's nothing girls of that age dislike so much as restraint, and to be in the minister's class — well, it's not to be thought of. Come now, Miss Hunt, I never knew you to be selfish before."

"Selfish!" the other echoed in innocent wonder.

"Why, what else is it?" her elder asked, with some tartness. "Do you suppose I would not like to come in here and have nothing to do but to listen to Mr. Forbes and to enjoy myself? But I know I am needed elsewhere," with a virtuous air. "We should think about that."

Both Lucy and Arthur blushed high at this statement of the case, and the latter looked indignant. He also perceived the necessity of

suppressing this feeling, and of coming to the support of his assistant.

"Perhaps you had better take the class," he said to Lucy. "You are quite competent, you know, and need have no fears on that score."

She looked pleased at his praise, but could not make up her mind to give the desired promise, the unwilling look coming back to her face and resting there like a little shadow. Arthur, flattered by these signs of reluctance, and still a little perversely inclined towards his assistant, would not urge her, and all three waited in silence.

"Very well, I shall say no more about it," Mrs. Henderson said at last, drawing her mantle over her shoulders to depart, "and if the class breaks up and they all go over to the Congregationalists it won't be my fault." "Going over to the Congregationalists" was the standing menace which this energetic woman held over the heads of the minister and her fellow-parishioners, and Arthur, who found it more difficult to please her than all the rest of the society, half hoped she was about to execute this threat in person, as, with an aggrieved air, she turned and left the study.

Lucy took up her books to follow, but was delayed by a question from Arthur. "Shall you take the class?" he asked, in a tone that expressed no desire or conviction on his own part, and left the decision entirely with her.

"I don't know," was the hesitating reply. "If you think I had better," looking timidly at him. He seemed to gather a sudden resolution, facing her with a steady look, and speaking in a more decided tone than he had used before.

"Yes, I think you had better take it," he said; "but don't be afraid; it will not be difficult. You are sure to get along as well as Miss Bailey."

He would have liked to say better, but restrained himself. "If you will wait a moment I will show you the lesson," he added, taking up a book. She looked at him in surprise. "You gave us the lesson before you dismissed us."

"I mean the lesson for your new class."

"Oh!" She smiled a little at her carelessness. "I had forgotten that I should not come in here any more," her voice sinking into a regretful accent, and casting a last glance about the little study. "I am so sorry; I don't like to leave now just as we are beginning on the Prophets." There was an expression of childlike grief and disappointment in the face she turned to his, and he did not look at it twice, busying himself with the books on his desk.

"Yes, I am sorry, too; we shall miss you." The words were friendly enough, but they had a formal sound, and seemed to put her at a distance. Arthur, conscious of this, spoke again in a more cordial tone: "But you are sure to profit more by

the teaching than you do here. There's nothing like the necessity of explaining them to others to clear up our own ideas. That's the reason we ministers are so wise," smiling. "Then you will know you are doing your duty, and preventing us all from going over to the Congregationalists." She tried to smile a little in return, and stepped towards the door.

"Good-by, then," he said, holding out his hand, an act which seemed to have no particular significance now, as she mechanically gave hers in return. "You must not give up your studies; you can easily go on by yourself now." There seemed a studied absence of any offer at further help which both of them noticed, but Arthur made no attempt to correct any unpleasant effect it might have produced; and she, finding it impossible just then to meet his eyes, and with that sense of helpless inferiority which seized her at times in his presence, echoed his good-by in a low voice, and left him. He stood on the threshold, looking after her as she passed through the hall to the outer door, opening his lips to call her back, for what he did not know, but resisting the impulse and turning abruptly back into the study.

On reaching home Lucy Hunt secured herself within the privacy of her own room, and indulged in a short "crying spell." She did not seek to

define the cause of her tears, but an intangible sense of disgrace attached itself to her wounded feelings; and she suffered the smart of that peculiar injury we feel when we have allowed ourselves to be led into an act of mistaken generosity. She had stood ready to give more to this new friend than he wanted, and now appeared weakly dependent on a relation which had never been of essential value to him. She was compelled to reflect, as she had been before, on the little knowledge she had of this man, who had lately come into her life to claim so large a share of her thoughts. He was, in fact, a stranger, of whose past she knew almost nothing, and much of whose inner self had been studiously withheld from her knowledge. On the other hand, he had been able to read her life and history at a glance. What was there to read in that life of quiet, sheltered girlhood, such as hers had been? Until her acquaintance with Arthur Forbes she had been as care-free as a child. He had taught her how to think, and it was impossible that at the same time she should not have learned how to feel. Did she, then, care too much for this new friend and helper; or, if not, was there danger that she sometime might have come to? These are idle questions. If Lucy Hunt stood at a critical point in her experience she was not to be permitted to know it, any more than the rest of us,

until it was past. We reach and pass many such points of awakening thought and feeling, when the touch of a hundred different circumstances has power to shape the unknown future. Our natures are not made of that inflexible material which can be run into but one mould. If it was to be love's touch that was to complete the fulfilment of Lucy Hunt's desires and dreams, the question still remained "Whose"? And here, too, accident and passing circumstance have their part to play. The verb "to love" has its potential mode as any other, to indicate that love, the thing itself, like fate in general, has its might-have-beens.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

TOM FLETCHER left Elk Rapids the day after Easter to go on to a point farther West, returning in a few days and remaining about a fortnight. During this time he was at the Hunts a good deal, in response to the constant solicitations of the oldest son, who, anxious to cultivate what he deemed a valuable acquaintance, and liking Tom on his own account, had the habit of bringing him in at all hours in the informal way in which the family made all their friends welcome. At first Tom accepted these hospitable advances in the same spirit in which they were offered; then, finding how much he liked to be with these new friends, and recognizing his motive more clearly, called himself to account. He had another object in this than any relating to himself. The uncomfortable thought had more than once crossed his mind that his presence in Elk Rapids was not as welcome to his old friend, Arthur Forbes, as he had a right to expect, the gloomy and restrained air which Arthur wore now-a-days giving color to this suspicion. But Tom was only partially right in the interpretation he put on

his friend's manner at this time, while Arthur was equally at fault in accounting for Tom's behavior; and a veil of mutual doubt seemed to have dropped down between them, rendering the old frank intercourse impossible. Arthur admitted that he was hurt and disappointed, though not for the reasons Tom had guessed. The unexpected meeting with his old friend had reopened all the past, and Arthur naturally looked for some sign of sympathetic remembrance of this on Tom's part. The incommunicativeness Tom had shown respecting his late visit to Dennison had been prompted solely by a desire to shield his friend from needless pain. He had nothing pleasant to tell, and had better refrain from telling it, was the practical way in which he summed up his duties in the matter. This resolve was strengthened by the fancied discovery of other facts in the case which warned him back from any attempt at interference. His own duty in the matter, both as regards his friend and himself, was very clear. If Arthur Forbes cared for Lucy Hunt, then he, Tom Fletcher, was bound not to care for her. Even if the thought of becoming his friend's rival were not so repugnant to him, it would be, Tom felt, of no use. He was not an over-modest man, and understood as well as another the extent of his own attractions among women; but Lucy presented the example of an entirely new type. Without possessing either the

beauty or the accomplishments of many others whom he knew, she was the superior of them all in that native truth and goodness which radiated like calm sunshine from her presence. A gentle, serious-minded girl like that would of course prefer a serious-minded husband, not a rattle-brained fellow like himself, who, before this, had never met a difficult duty in his life, much less gone out of his way to find one, as Arthur was always doing. Such a girl would naturally choose to be a minister's wife. With her loving heart and helpful ways there were few that would make a better. Tom had heard something of the town gossip, and knew there were others who felt the same. Yet it seemed a pity, he could not but reflect. It was a burdensome life at best, involving continual self-sacrifice, that any minister's wife could lead, especially one of Arthur's views, bound to the side of a small and unrespected minority. Lucy Hunt, who had lived a life of restricted opportunity in the Western town where she was born, aided only by a year's study in a provincial academy, deserved a better fate. There was something else she deserved, Tom thought, and that was a love as fresh and unsullied by any remembrance of the past as that which she would give in return. What could Arthur give her but the ashes of an affection quenched in bitter disappointment? What was such a pale after-glow of love worth

compared with that first upspringing flame Tom felt burning in his own heart? What right had any man to take so much and to give so little? Tom waxed quite indignant as he asked himself these questions. In the troubled medley of such thoughts he felt himself alike a traitor to his friend and the deserter of his own manhood. He could only take consolation for the accumulated villany he thus heaped on himself in the thought that, after all, the loss was only his. It was with a lugubrious smile that he reflected on the incredulity with which those who knew him best would regard his present situation. Tom had passed through the first period of young bachelorhood with heart and fancy untouched by the image of any particular woman. At first he had enjoyed his freedom, and rather plumed himself on his escape from those matrimonial toils and errors into which his friends had fallen; but of late he had begun to deplore his lot, — whether in jest or earnest his friends hardly knew, — professing to envy all of his married acquaintance, and declaring there was nothing he desired so much as to fall in love. When some of his older feminine friends came to understand this they made an eager rush to his assistance, marshalling such an array of young, womanly charms before him that he felt like a grand pasha, surfeited with his prospective riches, and with a losing wish to buy. This losing dispo-

sition suddenly disappeared when he saw Lucy Hunt, and the half-whimsical desire he had before admitted became the strongest impulse of his life. There was no need to nurse the strange, sweet, warm feeling that had glowed in his heart ever since. In his social experiences it was inevitable that Tom should have met many gracious and charming women, and he was himself at a loss to account for the charm of this one, so different from them all. He tried to explain it by saying that the attractions of the others were too manifest, while here they rather lay in the absolutely unstriking quality of their owner's looks and character. Lucy Hunt's attraction was not to be explained by any single grace or feature, but consisted instead in that quiet harmony of tone we note, with such agreeable effect, in the summer twilight.

Tom had fancied that, when the time came, he should marry a woman who possessed unfailing resources of entertainment within herself, a bright, talkative woman, who knew how to mix sense and nonsense in just the right proportions, and who would keep him endlessly amused; but his imagination was now taken captive by just the opposite type. It was absurd to think of Lucy Hunt's setting herself out to entertain any one; and thus far in their acquaintance it was Tom who had done all the talking, while she listened. He

had never before felt the inspiration of just that kind of listening. Neither had Arthur Forbes, who often found himself yielding to the spell that lay in the attentive upward gaze of those gray eyes. Arthur talked theology and the advisability of introducing the graded system into the Sunday-school, and Tom chattered nonsense; but the effect was the same in both cases. Arthur had, indeed, noticed that the eyes were gray; but, never having admitted anything in relation to their owner, was not obliged to find any significance in so small a circumstance; though undoubtedly it was a matter of unconscious congratulation that they never yet had lost their look of friendly trust, to flash the warning of a contradictory opinion at him, or to pierce him with a look of averted affection and suspicion.

Though Tom held to his resolution as well as he was able, it was impossible to remain away from the Hunts altogether; as, when he called, one day towards the last of his stay at the Rapids, to keep an appointment with his friend George. The latter, through some misunderstanding, failed to meet him, and it was Lucy who rose to receive Tom as he entered the parlor, apologizing for her brother's carelessness. The temptation to linger for a few moments was great, and Tom, who had heard the sound of the piano as he approached

the house, made a request for some music the excuse for remaining. Lucy made no more pretence to musical skill and talent than to any other, and she would rather that Tom had not asked her to play; but since he had, it seemed neither right nor polite to refuse, so she seated herself at the instrument, and played a simple arrangement of some popular operatic airs. Tom was oddly amused with himself for the genuine interest he took in the performance, standing behind, and a little to one side of the player, where he could note the graceful line of the neck just back of the ear, and the delicate curve of the cheek.

When she had finished she turned on the stool and looked up at him apologetically. "You will not care to hear me play after the excellent music you have heard in the city." There was a sincerity in these words that compelled an equal candor in reply, though Tom found opportunity to make his, equally complimentary and honest.

"It is not the excellence of a thing that contributes most to our enjoyment of it. I like to listen to your playing better than to many professional artists I have heard." She looked surprised at this, and also a little disturbed. "Don't think I mean to flatter you," he made haste to protest. "I only mean that our enjoyment of a thing depends on so much besides the thing itself, —

on our own mood and the circumstances surrounding us, and — and the one who is doing it," coloring, and laughing a little. "I like your music because it is yours."

She still seemed unable to understand, and changed the subject. She never liked talking about herself, having little gift at repartee, and none of that mental adroitness that knows how to thrust and parry with words as a trained fencer with a sword. She asked him if he had heard a famous singer who was then making a tour of the larger cities. Replying in the affirmative, he went on to give her an account of the principal musical and dramatic events of the season, talking in his best strain, and sketching for her a series of pictures drawn from his reminiscences of Faust, Linda, and Booth's Hamlet, each wonderful to her as fairy-land. She sat before him with folded hands and upturned face, a look of unquestioning faith in her eyes, and that fascinated absorption with which a child listens to the marvellous tales of its elders. The peculiar inspiration which Tom felt under this sort of listening has been described; but, though it had the effect of making him talk his best, an undercurrent of troubled thought kept pace with his lively chatter.

"A man would have to feel himself a tremendously good fellow to try to win the love of a girl like that; else how small he would feel when

she found him out. I might tell her anything I liked, and she would believe it, not because it is I who say it, but because she has never found out that anybody speaks anything but the truth. I wonder what she thinks of me any way. I must seem a hopelessly frivolous fellow beside" —

Such were the unspoken thoughts that ran through his mind as he stood negligently leaning against the back of a large chair, looking down at her, unconscious that he was making any particular impression on his own part. For, though Lucy was listening too intently to give definite shape to other thoughts than those suggested by her companion's talk, a picture was forming in her mind which memory would preserve. She was not one to make conscious recognition of new mental impressions or to attempt to define each passing emotion and sentiment. There was something about this new acquaintance that pleased and interested her; but she had not asked herself what it was. She only knew that he was different from any one she had ever seen before. She was insensibly affected by that air of city-bred ease and grace which Tom imparted into his slightest action. Another woman, like Virginia, accustomed to that double enjoyment of the emotions which repetition in imagination brings, would have carefully analyzed and understood what it was that pleased her; would have noticed the nice unobtru-

sive taste which governed Tom in matters of dress, the polished ease of his bearing, and that delightful courtesy which served as fit expression of a generous and genial disposition. Lucy did not know that it was any one of these things which pleased her, hardly indeed that she was pleased, so unregarded did time and her thoughts slip by while she sat there listening.

Tom asked for more music, taking a sheet from the piano, and placing it on the rack before her. "That is one of Mr. Forbes's favorites too," she said as she looked at it. She had spoken carelessly, but the name had no sooner escaped her than the recollection of the recent slight disturbance of her relations with Arthur brought the color to her cheek, and she grew embarrassed, while Tom felt a little cold constraint settling over his own spirits. She went through the piece rather awkwardly. When she had finished he made no attempt at comment on the performance, absorbed in other thoughts.

"It is a great pleasure to me to know how well Forbes is doing here," he said, looking at her with a guarded expression.

"Yes," she replied, "he is doing very well. We like him so much, — I mean papa and the rest of the church. He is so different from any one we ever had before."

Tom wanted to know how he was different.

"I mean he is so much more in earnest, and so — religious. I can't explain myself very well. The others — they didn't seem to care at all about the things he does, but just lectured and left us to ourselves," smiling a little. "What I mean is that he is so much more spiritual than they, and devotional, — really religious, you know. Yet he is very radical, too."

Tom tried to explain to her that the devotional sentiment has little to do with intellectual conviction, but finds its root in the moral temperament independently of any particular belief. "Forbes is a natural believer and worshipper," he said; "I wouldn't give him too much credit for it," with a smile. "He can't help it any more than your ivy over there," with a glance at the green-bowered window, "can help climbing upward. If you take away one prop it finds another. That's the way with a nature like my friend Arthur's. When it finds itself obliged to give up the minor objects of faith it plants itself more strongly on the essential principles."

Lucy would not have understood just what was meant by essential principles a short time before; but the kind of preaching she had been listening to lately had taught her, and she gave intelligent assent to what she had heard.

"You and Mr. Forbes have known each other a long time?" she said, lifting her eyes to his.

Tom replied that he had first met Arthur in college, and that they had been friends ever since.

"Then you knew him when he gave up his connection with the church?"

He said Yes, but volunteered no further information on that point.

"It seems a pity that his family should have opposed and blamed him."

"His family blame him!" exclaimed Tom in amazement; "he has no family, at least, only a sister, and she is more radical than he." A deep blush spread over Lucy's face. Now that she thought of it, she knew long before that Mr. Forbes's parents were dead, and that his only near relative was a sister; yet the impression had fastened itself so strongly in her mind the day she talked with him, that he was at variance with some near friend, that it had put her real knowledge of him out of sight. She saw she had made a foolish blunder, and was guiltily ashamed of seeming to pry into affairs not her own.

"I beg your pardon — I understood — I thought there had been some trouble."

Tom's countenance wore a grave and disturbed look. It was becoming plain to him that the young woman before him knew next to nothing of the history of her young pastor. How much did she guess? That was not a matter that concerned him, nor was it for him to enlighten her. His com-

panion still looked so disturbed over what she felt to be the silly mistake she had made that Tom, with a wish to restore her to ease, tried to divert her thoughts by turning the talk to her brother, and the possibility of his removal to the city. Though he had not positively discouraged this project of his friend, he did not approve of it, foreseeing a much better chance for success in his present position, as the natural inheritor of his father's practice, than in the crowded mart of the city.

"Do you want him to go?" he asked his sister.

"I can't really want it," she said tremulously; "we should miss him so." Her voice sank to a regretful sigh, and Tom said to himself that he should at once express his serious disapproval to Hunt. "But if it is the best thing for him;" she added, looking up at him with a questioning face, "what do you think?"

There was an agreeable flattery in this solicitation of his opinion; but Tom felt bound to be all the more careful in his reply.

"Oh, he would get on in the city; he is one of the most capable young lawyers I know." The sister's eyes thanked him for this. "But of course he would have to wait. His success is sure to be much more rapid here, and it seems a pity to throw away his present chance. Still, he would get on. Perhaps I could help him a little."

"That would be very kind in you," with

another grateful look which made Tom feel inclined to offer Hunt a partnership.

"Then you can come and visit him, and we will show you the sights. You have never visited the city?"

She said "No," in an abstracted manner, her thoughts still with her brother; while Tom had a lively foretaste, in fancy, of the peculiar sensation to be derived from showing the lions to this quiet, serious-eyed girl; of walking down State street with her, or driving along the broad avenues and noting her fresh, unspoiled interest in all she saw. From this point of view her brother's removal to a larger sphere of action seemed more advisable, and it was to entice her thoughts in this direction that he entered upon a lively description of city life, she losing herself again in the interest of the narrative, and looking up at him with smiling attention, and a shy pleasure in her face. While thus engaged the door opened, and Arthur Forbes entered. The smile quickly faded, and a surprised flush swept over her face as she rose to greet this new visitor, who stood halting and frowning on the threshold at the unexpected sight before him. The two young men exchanged a single brief look which had all the effect of a challenge; then Tom, shaking himself free from his momentary embarrassment, stepped towards the other and extended his hand. He spoke in his usual tone

of jovial comradeship; but Arthur, whose natural constraint always increased when he was laboring under any unpleasant surprise, replied coldly, and Tom was convinced that his old friend was more displeased with him than ever. Turning to Lucy with some formal excuse for his intrusion, which had the effect of increasing the embarrassment of all three, Arthur explained that he had come to see Mrs. Hunt on some charitable errand. Lucy asked him to be seated, explaining that her mother, who was out, would soon return; but he declined the chair she proffered him, saying he must go.

"Then I will go with you," said Tom. Arthur opened his lips to negative this proposition, but could think of nothing suitable to say, and remained silent, while Tom turned to his hostess and repeated his adieu.

She stood in the door-way as the young men passed through the hall and outer door, responding with a faint smile to Tom's final salute, which faded again as she gravely bowed to his companion.

"Well, old fellow, it has been a long time since I have seen you," said Tom, taking his friend's arm as they passed down the street. "What have you been doing with yourself? I just dropped into the Judge's to keep an appointment with his son, who did me the honor to forget all about it. Result is, another day wasted, and twenty-four

hours' more delay before I can start home. In the meantime, business all going to the dogs, I dare say."

Arthur was quick to detect a false note in this kind of talk, and was further irritated over the mistaken necessity Tom felt himself under to explain his presence at the Hunts.

"It's not very flattering to Miss Hunt to call the time wasted," he said, with a little sarcasm. The thought passed through Tom's mind that it might be worse than wasted; but he only replied, dropping his former tone to a more sober one, "That is true. I share your admiration for Miss Hunt."

"What do you mean by that?" Arthur demanded, sharply. "I don't admire — at least — that is — everybody admires Miss Hunt, of course."

"Of course; that is what I meant. Do you go this way?" as they reached the corner where Arthur turned. "Well, good-by. I go to-morrow, you know. If you see my friend Forbes anywhere, and he is in a safe temper, tell him I'll be round this evening."

Arthur knew that he was not behaving well. He was suffering from that feeling of helpless anger and annoyance which seizes us when we find ourselves in a position where every word and act is misconstrued, and we cannot, without an

indelicate intrusion on the rights of others, set ourselves right. It is true that he was both surprised and disappointed to find Tom with Lucy Hunt. He had been honest in saying that he wished to see her mother; but this had been only the superficial reason of his visit, though it would not have interfered, but rather helped his plans, if he had found the two together. He had conscientiously remained away from the house of late, and, except for the evening spent there with Tom, this was the first time he had been there since the interview in the study. He had prepared to pay this visit at last with that sense of merit and good desert which follows adherence to a difficult resolution. The presence of Tom put a sudden check to these hopes, and the feeling of injury he had been lately cherishing against his friend flamed out for a moment in unreasoning jealousy. He had never seen Lucy Hunt look more animated and pleased than in that brief glimpse of her, as she sat with her face upturned to Tom's. What egotistic folly to suppose that she had been holding any words or action of his in painful remembrance all this time! She had not missed nor thought of him, and for that he was bound to feel honestly glad; and so he should as soon as the sting of the first humiliation was over; but the sore feeling towards his old friend remained, and was justified, he thought, by the

other's behavior, which seemed to have lost all the old frankness. If Tom and Lucy Hunt liked each other it was nothing to him, though it was hard to resist the impulse to rebel against a state of things which forced him to stand as rejoicing witness to a kind of happiness fate had denied to him. Where is the soul, still smarting with the loss of its own expectations, that can look on and joyously applaud its neighbor's success? The most that the bruised and luckless heart can do, at such times, is to cover its face with the veil of its own shame, and wait for the healing effects of time and just repentance. Arthur, as has been said, had reached that first stage of repentance which comes with the knowledge of our own bad behavior. By dint of virtuous mental exercise he was able to bring himself to a better mood during the next few hours, and greeted Tom in his usual manner when he called that evening.

They talked of impersonal matters at first, discussing those wise and important topics that make up the staple of masculine conversation, the political news of the day, a recent labor strike, and the lawsuit which had brought Tom to the West. The business connected with the last was unfinished, yet Tom had determined to return home.

"Then you will be back again soon?" Arthur said.

"No, I shall not come back," was the reply, thoughtfully spoken. "Hunt can attend to things well enough now."

"I am sorry for that. It has been a great treat, seeing you again." If these words sounded a little strange, in view of the speaker's unsettled behavior during the last few days, Tom let them pass.

"I get terribly lonesome at times," continued Arthur, with a sigh.

Tom looked at him attentively. "Yet you like your work here?"

"Yes, I like it," in a tone of weary assent, quite unlike the joyful assurance of Easter morning.

"You would like to be nearer Dennison, perhaps?"

A painful compression sealed the other's lips a moment. "What should I gain by that?" he asked.

"I was thinking of your sister. You would naturally like to be near her." Tom had no sooner given this answer than the trivial sound of it struck him as plainly as it did his listener. He had perceived the direction of Arthur's thoughts, and, after regarding him quietly for a moment, spoke again. "What would you like to gain?"

Arthur threw a reproachful glance at him. "That is a strange question for you to ask."

Tom began to feel the stirring of new hopes in his breast, but looked at his friend with the same thoughtful scrutiny as before.

"If it is Rachel Armstrong you are thinking about," — he began slowly.

"If!" Arthur exclaimed. "Is there any one else to think about?"

He spoke in a defiant tone, as if he were hurling a challenge at some one, and the two men looked at each other steadily a moment.

"Well, I don't know," Tom replied, with a faint smile. "That is, I" — as Arthur frowned, and continued to bend that accusing look at him. "No, I suppose not," he ended, helplessly. Arthur turned away.

"Yet you have not mentioned Miss Armstrong since I have seen you," Tom began again, with cunning defence.

Arthur threw another reproachful look at him. "Is that my fault?" he asked, and his listener's face admitted the justice of the rebuke.

"Have you nothing to tell me?" he asked, as the other still kept silent. "Did you see her?"

"Only to meet her in the street," was the reply. "She gave me a frigid little bow, which has made me feel cold ever since. She never liked me, I think." There was nothing like a little opposition to test the real nature of his friend's feelings, Tom thought.

"It was no fault of hers if she did not," was the quick retort. "You were always ridiculing and scoffing at everything." Tom thought this rather severe, but did not try to defend himself.

"But you saw her," Arthur urged with hungry impatience. "How did she look?"

She had in reality looked a little pale and cast down; but Tom did not think it necessary to say so, and only replied that she looked about as usual. Arthur dropped his head on his arms on the table, and groaned.

Tom rose from his chair to give vent to the strong exultation swelling at his heart. Then, putting aside his own feelings, he stepped over and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"My dear boy, I thought you were getting over this," he said, with both real and artful sympathy.

Arthur raised his face.

"I shall 'get over it' when I die, if, as some people think, that is the end of us, — never before."

"So bad as that?" the other responded, with well-assumed gravity of look and tone. "Then," hesitatingly, and as if doubting the wisdom of his purpose, "I had better not tell you what I heard when I was in Dennison."

Arthur flashed a look of quick mistrust at him. "What did you hear?" he asked in his coldest tone.

Tom felt a little discomposed, but there also arose a natural desire to justify himself.

"Why, there is a report that Miss Armstrong is to marry Robert Knowles," he began, carelessly. "It seems they have been thrown together a good deal in their church-work this winter; there has been a series of revivals, in which both have been very active. There is no doubt the young man is hopelessly gone. People are agreed that the match is a suitable one, and her father openly encourages it." He paused, while Arthur sat perfectly silent with compressed lips and a quivering nostril to attest the feelings within.

"Of course," Tom went on, excusingly, "there may be nothing in it. A little town like Dennison is always full of gossip. I can't say what the rumor is worth."

"I will tell you," said Arthur, in repressed quiet. "It is not worth the breath taken to repeat it. Marry Robert Knowles!" he exclaimed, scornfully. "I know better! She may never marry me," his voice dropping, and a look of pain darting across his features; "I begin to think she never will; but she will never marry any one else."

"Arthur! what infatuation!"

Arthur turned quickly towards him. "You know nothing about it!" he said, sharply. "Excuse me, Tom," in a gentler tone. "You are a

good fellow, and there's no friend I think more of; but there are some things you can never understand. She is as little likely to marry as I am, and you know how unlikely that is."

Tom did not know, but was beginning to be convinced. He saw that Arthur was profoundly in earnest, and that his heart was still faithful to his first love. "But what then?" he reasoned. All danger was not past on that account. There is no more blind and selfish person than a disappointed lover, and Tom foresaw a number of difficulties into which a young man of his friend's ardent and abstracted nature might run.

"Very well, my boy," he said. "I am bound to believe what you tell me; but I want to give you a word of caution. One in your position cannot be too careful. A young man, and a clergyman, constantly thrown into the society of young women, as you are"—

"What do you mean?" Arthur interrupted, in amazement. "I don't know any young women. I can't remember their names."

Again the eyes of the two young men met, and held each other in a steadfast gaze. Then a slow flush colored Arthur's face. With a little effort he spoke. "You are mistaken, Tom. If it is that you are afraid of"—

"Afraid of?" the other repeated, in feigned surprise; then looking a little ashamed of this

piece of shallow deception. "You are right; I was afraid of it."

"You have no reason," said the other, a little sadly. He looked up at his friend with an affectionate, yet mournful, smile. "You are a lucky fellow, Tom. When did the gods ever refuse a gift of your asking?"

"What do you mean?" asked Tom, eagerly. "Do you think"—

He stopped in shamed surprise at his own daring. Arthur, too, perceived they were going too far; and, in defence of the absent, and copying his friend's manner, took another tone.

"On the whole, no; I don't think so. A man ought to be a pretty good fellow who is looking in that direction," unconsciously repeating Tom's own thought of a few hours before. "She is one of the best girls I know; as good and earnest as she is gentle. You are not very earnest yourself, Tom."

"I know it," the other said, penitently. "That's the reason I was afraid. I declare, it almost made me wish I was a minister myself."

"Nonsense," said Arthur, in a half-displeased tone, but looking a little flattered also. Tom, finding it easier to part from him in this mood than in a more sentimental one, said he must be off; and the two friends bade each other good-night.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNPLEASANT AWAKENING.

RACHEL ARMSTRONG recovered from the first sharp pain of the separation from her lover only to remain a long time afterward in a state of dull bewilderment. Though she honestly tried to understand what had happened, she could only partially succeed, for there had been nothing in her previous experience and mental training to prepare her for such a trial. The principles of her religious belief were to her no more a fit subject of discussion than the law of gravitation; yet, contrary as it may appear, it was the theological aspects of religion which interested her least, though she had never recognized this, nor learned to distinguish between the doctrinal phases of the creed she held and those spiritual effects and benefits which seemed their direct outcome. Having been taught all her life to distrust nature and her own heart, it was not strange that she could not, at a word, agree to a line of reasoning that claimed no other foundation. The church, with its publicly professed beliefs, was something more than an outward symbol to her, and bore rather that character of militant authority and

power which the Roman Catholic ascribes to his particular order.

There were other features of the Catholic faith which attracted her at this time; and if her Protestant fellowship had offered her some retreat, where, escaping worldly distractions, she might seek relief from her present pain and disappointment in religious meditation, she would have availed herself of it gladly. For Rachel Armstrong believed that, from this time forward, life could mean nothing for her but renunciation, an end she had often contemplated in the written lives of the saints with a kind of exalted envy. It is characteristic of natures like hers, marked by fervent piety and a strong ascetic tendency, to seek to reap what measure of spiritual profit and recompense they can out of every painful experience. Belief in the principle that "the Lord loveth those whom he chasteneth" leads very naturally to a reversed form of statement, inclining most of us, under pressure of misfortune, to reflect upon the degree of heavenly favoritism in which we stand.

Rachel Armstrong's suffering was both acute and real; but in how many of us does suffering not intensify rather than abate our natural egotism? But if there was a slight tinge of self-righteousness in her behavior, at this time, it should not exclude recognition of other traits that ran

beside, and seemed to contradict it, often indeed entirely to hide it. Failing of her cloistered retreat, she at once threw herself with additional zeal into all the active duties of her lot, returning to her labors in the school-room with a determination to perform them in a more conscientious spirit than ever before, devising a hundred new and difficult tasks for herself; and entering into the work of her church with the same earnest and, as she believed, consecrated purpose. Here she was brought into constant association with Robert Knowles, the young superintendent, — a circumstance that she heeded no more than the presence of the sexton or the color of the pulpit-cushion. Mr. Knowles was a young man whose temperament was indicated in the sanguine hue of his complexion, and whose hopes, being easily colored by his desires, found some natural encouragement, perhaps, in the friendly interest and support of his assistant.

Rachel Armstrong had but little knowledge of young men, and little social experience of any kind. She was, moreover, without that instinct of coquetry which enables most women to detect the approach of a lover at an immeasurable distance, as the practised huntsman feels the coming footstep of his prey in some disturbed atmospheric condition, too subtle to be explained, before he hears the actual sound of it.

Miss Armstrong saw in Mr. Knowles a young man of exemplary habits and opinions, whom most of the other young men of the village, of idle and dissolute ways, would do well to copy after. For herself, however, though he was a few years her senior, and her superior in office, she made no pretence of looking up to him nor of seeking his counsel, taking rather free advantage, on the contrary, of his willingness to listen to and be instructed by her, and feeling about the same kind of interest in him that she did in the older boys of her class. Moreover, her long engagement to Arthur Forbes had guarded her against any advances from others of his sex; and, since this engagement was broken, she had that sense of widowed loss which she unconsciously relied on to shield her from such approaches. This illusion was rudely dispelled one day, when, on her return from school, her father met her at the threshold of the little sitting-room, and asked her to come in. He closed the door after her with a little air of mystery that aroused no particular attention on her part, however; and it was with a rather listless air that she seated herself in obedience to his request, and waited for him to speak. He had a message to impart to her, he said, from Mr. Knowles; a young man, he took occasion to explain, whom he held in the highest respect, and who had behaved in this particular

instance with the greatest propriety. "A truly worthy and excellent young man," he concluded, in his patronizing tone. "You agree with me, my daughter?"

"I think well enough of him, father," was the rather cold reply. "Does Mr. Knowles want anything of me?"

Rachel Armstrong respected her father as much as ever; but certain looks and tones of his had begun, of late, to affect her with a new sensation, a nervous irritability and dislike, giving rise to a frequent, unreasoning wish to avoid his company, which she was ashamed of, but could not overcome. She wondered a little at the nature of the business presented in this way;. but, as the superintendent was in the habit of consulting with her father, she did not give the subject much attention.

"You speak with some impatience, my daughter. Impatience is a fault of yours, as it was with the rash disciple. You should strive to correct it."

She began at once, folding her hands tightly on the books which rested in her lap, and leaning back in her chair with half-closed eyes.

"Mr. Knowles has expressed certain wishes to me. They do him great credit; and, as I said, his manner to me," with an emphasis on the last word, "was most respectful. These wishes con-

cern you, my child, and they have naturally aroused strong emotions in my own breast. It is for you to grant them fulfilment. In so doing you will perform an act in every way gratifying to me and, I may add, to Mr. Knowles also. He desires to make you his wife."

The opening remarks by which he had led the way to this startling disclosure had only puzzled her, and she had opened her eyes to look at him with that little frown of fixed attention which came out on her forehead whenever she was perplexed or disturbed. As he proceeded her mystification seemed to increase with each slowly worded, lumbering sentence; but, when the last words were spoken, she rose to her feet with a startled exclamation, while the indignant color covered her neck and face.

"You seem surprised, my daughter," her father began again; "yet I supposed you had foreseen this, as others have."

"Father!" in a rebuking voice; "I foresee? What was there to foresee?" Then, raising her head proudly, "It is presumptuous."

"I do not think so," the old man replied, in a more set tone than before. "Mr. Knowles is an upright and respectable young man, and of good standing in the church. He is in a prosperous position; and, from a worldly point of view, such a marriage would be most desirable; though I do

not urge such considerations," with returning piety of mien.

"I beg you will say no more, father," she said, facing him with a displeased look. "It is not to be thought of."

"What have you against Mr. Knowles?" he asked, dropping his former manner, and speaking with the dictatorial note she knew so well, but seldom evoked against herself.

"Everything!" she replied, her spirit catching the angry fire of his. She forced herself into outward calmness. "Nothing, but I do not wish to marry him. I shall never marry any one."

Her father eyed her narrowly.

"If you mean that your heart is still fixed on that misguided young man"—

"Father!" in a cry of distressed entreaty, and turning an imploring face to him, "What would you have? He has gone away; I—I have given him up."

"True, my daughter. Strength was given you to reject temptation; but the heart may still have its unregenerate desires. Arthur Forbes is an impious blasphemer, and"—he stopped, compelled by the face she turned towards him. With an insulted look she moved toward the door, and passed through, going directly upstairs, to shut herself in her room. Her sister, hearing her, and unaware of what had taken

place, came out on the narrow landing to speak to her.

"Has my father returned?" she asked. "Mr. Knowles was here this afternoon, and they"—she paused, struck into silence by the expression of the other's face.

"You knew it, then," darting a quick, suspicious glance at her.

"Knew what?" the other replied, more puzzled than before. "Come in here," she added, in a tone of quiet command, unusual with her, and turning back to her room. Rachel hesitated, then stepped slowly across the threshold, seating herself mechanically near the door.

"What has happened?" the older sister inquired; but the younger was now on her guard.

"It is nothing," she answered, coldly; "nothing that you can help me about."

"At least I should like to try," the other replied; but Rachel sat with eyes bent frowningly before her and remained silent.

"Is it Mr. Knowles who has offended you?" her sister asked, a glimmer of light breaking across her.

"Mr. Knowles is nothing to me," was the sharp reply. Then the glimmer of light became a flood, and Mrs. Meredith knew all she wanted to. She looked at her sister with a curious smile. "He would like to be something, perhaps."

The other turned upon her with the same accusing look as before.

"Then, if you knew it, why did you not speak to me, and warn me?"

"How was I to know that any warning was needed? You have been on very friendly terms with Mr. Knowles. He has been here a good deal, and you have accepted attentions from him."

"Attentions? I have accepted attentions?" the other repeated in the utmost surprise.

"What do you call it when he accompanies you to and from church, or to teachers' meeting? Did you think," she went on, relentlessly disregarding the shocked expression of her listener, as she heard things of this kind cast up against her, "because he always made some Sunday-school matter the pretext for coming here, that that was his real object? Any other young woman would have known better."

"Then I am glad I am not like other young women."

"You have always been rather glad of that, haven't you?" with faint irony, which both surprised and disconcerted the one who heard it.

Rachel Armstrong was eight years younger than her sister; but, by virtue of an active and self-reliant character, she seemed the leader of the two. Mrs. Meredith had one of those timid, dependent natures which instinctively seeks the

support of one stronger than itself, together with an indolent and ease-loving temperament that avoids contention at any cost. She thus seemed to agree with the ways and opinions of her family more than she really did, leading a rather companionless life beside her father and sister, and finding her chief happiness in her children, who adored her, and called her their "beautiful mamma," but who did not always mind her so well as they did their aunt Rachel. But the meekest nature will not always contentedly occupy a secondary place nor forego its natural right of observation. Mrs. Meredith had watched her sister closely of late, with a growing insight into each separate motive and line of conduct, that would have greatly astonished and displeased the subject of this scrutiny had she been aware of it. "She thinks, if she can only make herself miserable enough, she is sure to prove herself in the right," was the way she summed up her sister's behavior at this time; but she was determined, if possible, to thwart the self-immolating projects of one whom she believed born to taste freely of life's enjoyments.

Mrs. Meredith believed that happiness is the rightful endowment of every human creature, and as necessary a means of moral growth as sunshine is to the plant. She looked back on her own life, and said to herself that, if she had been a

happier woman, she would have been a better one. The suffering she had experienced at a critical period of her life had been but a process of self-mutilation which had left her a poor, maimed creature ever since; and she was determined not to stand by and witness a similar process of moral crippling in her sister. Since the latter could always beat her in argument, she resolved to try the effect of a little gentle sarcasm; and a sarcasm, clothed in a low, slow utterance, accompanied by a pensive droop of the eyelids and a deprecating glance, loses its harshest sting, and makes gradual lodgment in the consciousness, like a rising scruple from within.

"Any other young woman, if she had understood matters sooner, would have been able, at least, to spare the young man's feelings," she added, after the little ironical comment she had let fall in her last words.

"I am not responsible for Mr. Knowles's feelings," was the impatient response. "He has taken an unfair advantage of our position; he had no right to speak to my father."

"No right? I do not understand." But she thought she did; and, as she watched the struggling emotions in the face now partly turned from her, she knew that the thoughts of the injured girl had taken instinctive flight to the love she had repudiated, but with which she still

sought to defend herself against the defiling touch of any other. She respected and was a little moved at this feeling, at the same time that she determined to do it some further violence.

"I do not understand," she repeated. "It is over a year since you broke your engagement with Arthur Forbes. You are now as free to be sought as any other woman. You are young, and"—

"Sister!" in an upbraiding voice. She trembled, and threatened to give way to the host of agitating feelings crowding her heart, and signalized in the flushed cheek, the heaving breast, and the shaking limbs. Her sister went over to her, and put her arms about her. "Forgive me, Ray," she said, gently; "but you hurt yourself more than any one else can hurt you. Why do you torture yourself like this? You love Arthur Forbes as much as ever."

The other raised her eyes. They wore a hunted and beseeching look, but a gleam of unconquered resolution shone in their depths.

"Perhaps I do," she said in forced quiet; "what then?"

"What then?" her sister echoed; "a great deal, — everything. When a women once admits her love for a man, she assumes a great responsibility. There is none greater in the world. She may live bitterly to repent and despise herself that she ever

lost sight of that, and to blush with shame that she could ever stop nicely to pick and choose between his safety and welfare and any considerations of her own peace and happiness."

Rachel looked at her sister in the greatest surprise, at a loss to understand the nature or cause of this impetuous outburst; but the spirit that had flamed out so suddenly soon paled back into its usual quiet; though there was still a little flutter of excitement in her manner as she bade Rachel remain where she was. "Wait," she said; "I have something to say to you."

She stepped across the room to a tall, old-fashioned bureau, that stood against the wall, its top just reaching the angle formed by the sloping roof. Opening the drawer, she took out a small ambrotype-case which she brought back, and, opening it, without looking at the enclosed picture, handed it to her sister.

"I have never shown you this, I believe."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HISTORY OF AN AMBROTYPE.

RACHEL looked, and saw the portrait of a young man with bold, dark eyes and a broad forehead standing prominently above the other features, which grew smaller towards the lower part of the face, where a sensitive mouth and chin gave it an unmistakable expression of weakness. A broad scarf tied loosely about the throat and the long backward sweep of the hair added a look of Bohemian carelessness to the portrait, and increased the unpleasant impression which it made on the present beholder. The face was one she had never seen before, and she looked up inquiringly at her sister.

"It is Frank Loring," the latter said; but the name had only an indistinct association in the other's mind, and she looked more perplexed than before.

"Not Dr. Loring's son?" she said, doubtfully.

"Yes."

"Not Frank Loring, the actor, who ran away from home, and was killed in a drunken quarrel?" in a tone of quick surprise and fear that carried its own accusation along with it; but the other,

listening with entire calmness, signified that it was the same. Rachel's bewilderment was now at its height, while a vague, unpleasant apprehension rose in her mind as she tried to account for her sister's possession of the portrait.

"You knew him then?"

"I knew him very well. We were engaged to be married."

"Engaged! You were engaged to Frank Loring?" Rachel could hardly credit her own hearing. The knowledge that this sister whom, though she had always tyrannized over her a little, she had always regarded as a model of womanly goodness and refinement, who was as innocent of evil as her own children, had been the betrothed wife of one bearing the wild and reprobate character of young Loring, such as the village gossip still preserved it, filled her with dismay. Rachel Armstrong had that pride of conscious rectitude that mars the character of many good women. Never an adept in concealment, her feelings now were too plainly betrayed not to be easily read by the other. A faint, bitter smile just touched the older woman's lips and then passed away, leaving the former expression of resigned sadness.

"What do you know about Frank Loring?" she asked, quietly. "He went away when you were a child. You can know nothing about him,"—in a little excitement,—"except what you

have learned from the slanderous tongues of his enemies."

"Then it is not true that he was killed, — that he died in that way?"

"It is perfectly true. Driven from home like a disgraced felon, denied all communication with the woman he loved, is it any wonder that, in his despair, he yielded to temptation, and fell into evil ways?"

The other turned her face away. It was too humiliating to listen to a plea like this from one she had thought so differently of.

"I see," said the first, with the same peculiar smile as before, "you think that a very weak defence. You are very strong; temptation has never assailed you. But for me," with a relapsed sigh, "I do not envy you such strength; I would rather be a little weak about some things."

Rachel Armstrong felt a return of her former irritation. She was not an easy subject for reproof at any time; and just now it seemed to her that her sister was in no position to criticise another.

"You are mistaken," she said, coldly, "if you think I pride myself on my strength. I am as subject to temptation as any one else; but" —

"But not of this kind," her sister quickly put in. "They are quite safe and respectable, your temptations, — the temptation to stay away from

church, or to mend a glove on Sunday. But temptation like this, that is something you never dreamed of, and you feel disgraced at the mere knowledge of it in some one else."

It was true. The sense of moral contamination was still the strongest within her; but, now that it had been so plainly pointed out to her, she began to feel ashamed of it. Looking into her sister's face, she read there the history of a long and patient suffering, whose signs she had never before heeded, and a new respect and a desire to understand her arose within her. Rachel Armstrong never meant to be unjust; but she was one of those in whom a sense of helpless discouragement is the first feeling aroused by every new discovery of human frailty and error, while the impulse to pity, to cheer, and to reconstruct, comes after, and is the result of an aroused conscience. Repeating her father's rebuke, and blaming her own impatience, she prepared to hear the whole of her sister's story.

"If you were engaged to this — to Mr. Loring, why did you not marry him?" she asked, in a less constrained manner.

"Why?" the other repeated, incredulously. "Would my father have been likely to approve such a marriage, do you think?"

Rachel drew back, and seemed newly disturbed at this mention of her father; but whether in dis-

approval of her sister's manner, or in memory of her own late interview with him, did not appear.

"I was only eighteen years old, ignorant and weak, and always afraid of my father. He insulted my lover, and forbade me to speak to him. Then he talked to me, and prayed over me;" this in a tone that made the listener shrink. "A father's curse hung over me. Heaven's curse would follow, he said. Heaven forgive me, I believed in those things then!"

"Sister!" the other exclaimed, in a shocked and frightened tone.

"That is all," the other added, her voice losing the strained intensity it had gained for a moment, and sinking back to its customary accent. "He went away, —Frank, I mean," lingering a little over the name. "When his father, who had never understood him, and had always been unjust to him, learned that my father would not consent to our marriage, he, too, turned against him; and, when he refused to give up the stage, drove him from home. He never saw his son again, until — they brought him home. Then he repented; but it was too late." There was silence in the little chamber.

"Afterward I met Mr. Meredith. He was a good man, much older than I, and sorry for me, I think. He would take me away. That alone seemed a great boon. My father urged the mar-

riage; and I — well, it did not make much difference to me. He was a good husband, and I tried to do my duty as a wife. When the children came I put away other thoughts that I might look into their faces with pure eyes. They have been my great blessing and comfort; but even children cannot wholly fill a woman's heart."

To Rachel Armstrong her sister's story seemed a pitiful revelation of human weakness, and very little that tale of heroic suffering and wrong which the latter so evidently regarded it. That her father had been unnecessarily severe and arbitrary she was prepared to believe; but that her sister had suffered more from this parental strictness than she would have, had she been allowed to follow her own will, she doubted. Yet she was sorry for her, though this sympathy did not extend to the original of the little ambrotype. She found it impossible to imagine any kind of life her sister could have led with this actor-lover, had she married him, that would not have been a perpetual sacrifice to vulgar tastes and degraded standards. Without looking at the portrait again, she closed the case, and handed it back to the owner, who held it in her hand as she began speaking again.

"It is as I said, — when a woman once admits her love for a man she assumes a great responsibility. If I had not been so cowardly, and had been faithful to the man I loved, he might have

lived to win an honorable name for himself, and not have died that disgraceful death."

"My dear sister," the other said, commiseratingly, "how many women have married men to reform them, and failed?"

"A great many," was the undisturbed reply; "but I should not have failed." Rachel felt that it was useless to argue here, and, for once, was indisposed to try.

"Do you know why I have told you this?" her sister began again. The other cast an uneasy glance at her, and did not reply.

"You know now what kind of a man our father is — oh, I mean no disrespect!" in reply to a look from her sister. "He is a good man, and highly respected, I know all that; but, so far, he has stood directly in the way of the happiness of all of his children. See how he treated our brother. It killed our mother. A little love and patience, a little harmless indulgence, might have kept him with us, and made a good and happy man of him instead of a wretched outcast, whose name we are ashamed to speak."

"Do you mean to say that my father is to blame for my brother's misconduct?" the other asked, in her most disapproving manner.

"I mean to say that pride and harshness never win people back to goodness, and that kindness may. His harsh severity drove his only son from

home, cruelly sacrificed the happiness of one daughter, and now seeks a similar sacrifice from the other."

Rachel Armstrong rose to her feet, but not in filial resentment. All such feeling passed over for a moment into one nearer and stronger. "You are mistaken," she said, lifting her head. "The two cases are not in the least alike. There can be no comparison between" — she stopped.

"If you mean that Arthur Forbes is not like Frank Loring, you are quite right. He has not the artistic temperament, and knows nothing of its struggles."

The other curled her lip. "That may be true," she said; "but he is, at least, a man of upright principle." She had no sooner spoken these words than she was seized with a quick revulsion of shame. "Forgive me," she said, extending her hand with a penitent gesture; "I should not have said that." Her sister took it with no appearance of wounded feeling.

"But you are mistaken also," the former went on, withdrawing her hand, "in supposing that my father is responsible for anything that has happened to me. I — I acted on my own judgment."

"At first, yes, — you are a good deal like your father, you know," in a manner that left it doubtful whether a compliment were intended or not.

"But how long would your judgment have sustained you without the aid of his? My poor child," drawing a step nearer, "do you think I cannot see how you punish and torment yourself day by day; how, when your own strength weakens and threatens to fail, you seek to fortify it in his; how you continually listen to advice you hate the sound of, preaching and praying down your own heart? You would not see Arthur Forbes when he was at home last summer, nor answer his letter; but the night he went away, when you knew he must pass the house, you stole out at midnight and hid yourself in the shadow of the porch to catch sight of him as he went by; and when he had passed, and stopped to turn back and look up at your window, you sprang out and almost spoke his name. Then you came back into the house and cried yourself to sleep. I know, for I saw you."

All manner of emotions were pictured on Rachel Armstrong's face as she listened to this unexpected and cruel disclosure; shame, extreme amazement, convicted pride, and displeasure; but all these gave way before that of sharp and anguished recollection, as for a few moments she lived over again all the pain and conflict she had gone through that night. Sinking on a chair she burst into tears, covering her face with her hands, her figure shaken with tempestuous sobs. This lasted but a

few moments. With a supreme effort she regained the mastery of herself, all the first feelings of wrong and mortification, arising from the exposure she had suffered, coming back to assist her resolution. The other watched her with a slight, compassionate smile.

"My dear sister, you are very proud," said she.

"Proud, I proud!" the other exclaimed. "You do not understand — that is not the reason."

"Oh, I know the reason! It is because he does not accept the doctrines." Rachel looked at her in increased bewilderment. Though she had never sought her sister's approval in the course she had pursued towards her lover, she had never doubted that she had it; the natural circumstances of the case, and all her previous knowledge of her, leading to this conclusion. But now it seemed that she was to gain a new acquaintance with her here as elsewhere.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Meredith, "do you know anything of these new doctrines Arthur Forbes has accepted? Ah, I see," as the other turned her head away; "you do not wish to know anything; you are afraid of them perhaps."

"Perhaps I am," was the unencouraging reply; "I am afraid of a great many things."

"You may be right," in an indifferent tone; "I confess I do not understand these new teachings myself." She opened a drawer in a table near by

and took from it a blue-covered pamphlet. "They are very attractive, but very vague. Have you seen this? It is one of his sermons."

"One of whose sermons?" Rachel asked, starting forward and then checking herself.

"Arthur Forbes's," in a composed tone. "I found it at the bookstore. It seems they think so well of his discourses out there that they sometimes print one. He writes well, but I don't always know what he is talking about. I dare say you are quite right not to read it," and she dropped the little book carelessly on the table.

It was impossible that such an interview between the two sisters should pass without results. Though no immediate effects were visible, it gave Rachel Armstrong many things to think about. First, she had gained a new knowledge of her sister, such as the intimate daily association of years had not enabled her to gain before. Along with this there began to arise a new and disturbed conception of her father's character, which modified and put in doubt the high estimate she had placed on it before; and, in spite of her best will and intention, she found herself taking silent exception to, and sometimes openly dissenting from, a form of expression or opinion to which she had hitherto yielded unhesitating assent. That night when she went down to take her usual place in the sitting-room, for evening prayers,

many troubled thoughts arose to disturb the reverential frame of mind she was accustomed to bring to such exercises. The image of her outcast brother hovered before her mental vision, and she found herself looking about the room during the reading of the Scriptures and wondering which seat would have been his were he still among them. It was six years since he ran away, and he would be nearly twenty now, almost a young man, and, had he proved different, the chief pride and hope of them all. She thought of her mother, also, that shadow-like presence that moved so quietly about the house, never exacting anything from others, even from her own children; and slipping so silently from among them at last that it seemed to the younger daughter, now she reflected on it, as if she had never been properly mourned nor even missed. The words "It killed our mother" filled her with sudden, strong compunction, and a longing wish to atone, that brought the tears to her eyes, so that the room swam in a mist before her as, the reading finished, she rose to kneel by her chair.

Even the voice of prayer had little power to uplift or strengthen her. On the contrary, there was something in the high, droning tones of the speaker, the air of pious self-exaltation with which he proffered his petitions, as if he had but to recommend himself to divine favor, and not entreat it like any

common sinner, that displeased her, and, framing a hurried prayer of her own for forgiveness, she rose to her feet.

Another sentence of her sister's stuck like an irritating burr in her memory, — "You are a good deal like your father, you know." Though she had always admired, in a certain way, and believed in her father, this belief had never taken the form of a wish to be like him. She asked herself now in some concern if, in her desire to be just and strong, she were indeed in danger of growing hard and narrow; if it were true, as he, her lover, had dared to hint on that last Sunday afternoon they spent together, that the grace of charity was not hers. A sudden, smarting sense of injury seized her as she reflected that this was the impression he still retained. Though she was by no means ready to admit any error in her main action, one of her old moods of self-disparagement began to settle over her, in which this action and all her conduct of the past two years seemed shorn of every vestige of that moral heroism which she had once believed to cover it. Along with this came one of those attacks of restless discontent with her present surroundings and mode of life, an eager desire for something different, some knowledge of the wide, free world beyond. In cutting rebuke of the conduct of the superintendent, she had resigned her position in the Sunday-school,

and even gone the length of remaining away from her own church two or three Sundays, and visiting those of the neighboring denominations, among others that to which Chase Howard ministered. The picture of Beatrice no longer pleased her. Her devout spirituality of look she now construed into a more supercilious expression, at the same time fancying she found an intolerable likeness in Beatrice's features to her own. All the old things — the work of the school-room, her household tasks, the people she liked, the books she was wont to read — grew infinitely tiresome. Mrs. Meredith, looking for the blue-covered pamphlet one day, could not find it, and, smiling, was careful to avoid the appearance of missing it. The one who had taken it derived little comfort from it, except from the chance to let her eyes rest lingeringly on the author's name on the cover, and a sense of renewed companionship which the contact of her fingers with his printed thoughts brought.

We speak of such recurring mental states as moods, to indicate that they have much the same light, evanescent effect upon character as the play of sunshine and cloud over the water's surface; but we might more truthfully compare them to the action of the waves themselves, with their perpetual ebb and flow, and the slow, sure impress which they leave on the continually changing shore.

While Rachel was in this same state of self-

convicted littleness Mrs. Meredith came to her one day in some excitement, and, thrusting a letter in her hand, bade her read it. Rachel looked, and, recognizing the handwriting, turned a little pale, darting a quick, suspicious look at the one to whom it was addressed.

"Read it," the latter said. "Oh, you needn't be afraid," a little scornfully, as her sister still hesitated and seemed as if she would hand the letter back to her; "there is nothing about you in it. He has found our brother Richard, and it is true — what I always believed — he is not such a wicked boy. Read it; it is from Arthur Forbes," and she almost pushed her sister into her room, and, closing the door, left her alone with the letter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PASSING ACQUAINTANCE.

WHILE occupying his pulpit in Elk Rapids Arthur Forbes paid an occasional visit to some of the neighboring towns to preach or lecture. On several of these trips he had passed through the small, deserted village of Richland, so named in honor of the munificent hopes that clustered round its early history when it was looked on as one of the most promising mining centres of that region. The town was picturesquely located on one of the middle ranges of the West, with a situation that commanded some of the finest views in a locality famed for its beautiful scenery; and Arthur, who had often wished to gain a nearer look at the place, stepped off the train one day, delaying his return home twenty-four hours, to pass that length of time in Richland.

The place wore a ragged and unkempt look, corresponding to the appearance of most of the inhabitants, — a shiftless and dissipated set, the sole remains of the busy population that once filled its streets. Richland was a relic of the old Placer mining-days, when wealth flowed down the

mountain-side with no other incumbrance than a little dirt; and a number of narrow, choked-up ditches and rotten flumes, the remains of this period, were still to be seen along the rocky declivity. It was not impossible that the former era of prosperity, indicated by these tokens, might return, if one could judge from the signs at one end of the village where a few men were engaged in sinking a shaft for mining purposes.

These operations were watched with languid interest by the residents, who had witnessed similar experiments before, and who preferred to confine their attention to such business transactions as were carried on over the counter and behind the painted blinds of Potter's saloon, where the spirit of luck still ruled, which use had long since rendered legitimate.

Arthur spent the afternoon in wandering over the mountain, going over at last to watch the operations of the men at the mining-shaft. After remaining here a few moments he turned to walk leisurely back to the village when he met a man whose pale, shaven face and suit of clerical black gave him the appearance of a young priest. The two men exchanged a look of interest, which on Arthur's part quickly changed to one of surprised recognition, and he involuntarily stepped forward as if to speak to the stranger; then, remembering that he was such, drew back again. The other,

noticing these movements, came to a half-pause also, looking at Arthur with a questioning face, upon which the latter stepped boldly forward and spoke.

"Pardon me, but is not this Henry Clifford?" he asked.

A painful flush swept over the face of the man thus addressed. The name was one which had attained an unpleasant notoriety in that region, and its owner might well doubt the motive that prompted such a question. He recovered himself, and quietly answered that it was.

"Then I should like to shake hands," Arthur said, in that impetuous fashion that overcame his quiet manner at times. "I attended your trial. I wanted to speak to you then, but I was not quite sure you would like it."

The other seemed to take no notice of the peculiar nature of the last remark. The same painful flush had colored his face at the mention of the trial, and he seemed lost for a moment in distressful memories.

"My name is Forbes," Arthur continued, after they had exchanged a hand-clasp, — an action passively performed by the stranger, — "Arthur Forbes."

The other threw a startled look at him. "Forbes!" he repeated, in surprise; — "not the radical preacher at the Rapids?"

It was Arthur's turn to color now, though not in resentment. He admitted that he was the same. The other drew a long breath, looking at Arthur with a mingled expression of admiration and slight distrust.

"Then I think I ought to tell you," with a faint smile, "that it is you who are partly to blame for the trial."

"I!" Arthur exclaimed.

"You see I had read your sermon on 'The Divine Immanence.' One of my brother ministers found it on my table, and called me to account for it. They couldn't very well bring up a thing like that at the trial," with a return of the faint smile; "but it had its effect."

Arthur did not know whether to express his regret or not. Now that he was brought face to face with one who had made such a strong mental impression on him months before, and whose image frequently rose before him, he felt more drawn to him than ever, and unwilling to part without better acquaintance. "Let us walk," he said, and the two young men, turning into an unused path that led along the side of the village, walked silently on until they reached a retired spot, where Arthur threw himself on the ground, and his companion seated himself on a rock near by.

"Now tell me all about it," Arthur said, looking up at him.

The friendly warmth with which this request was put met a response in a deepening glow of the dark eyes, while the stranger's general look and attitude bespoke a disposition to unbend and accept the sympathy here offered.

There was little to tell that, in the light of modern theological events, cannot be surmised.

Arthur soon saw that here before him was one of those gentle and patient natures which, to the undiscerning, bear the semblance of cowardly weakness; yet which carry underneath a martyr's courage and resoluteness of purpose. Henry Clifford was a man doomed by destiny and the singular blending of contrasts in his own nature to be perpetually misunderstood by his fellows, and to bear the cross of public mistrust and persecution. He had not sought the notoriety which came to him through the public trial held at the last session of the Ministers' Conference to which he belonged. On the contrary, he disliked and shrank from it, as a vainer man would have found his reward in it; and the remembrance of the recent exposure he had undergone afflicted him with much the same feelings of shame and distress he had experienced at first.

The trial had gone against him. His prosecutors believed that sufficient evidence was found in the confessed statement of his views on inspiration and probation after death to convict him of

unsoundness in the faith, whose dangerous effects could be checked only by banishment from their fellowship. It had been a terrible blow to the young minister. Bred from childhood in the faith which his maturer judgment had made deliberate choice of, this violent expulsion from the religious household he loved affected him like an open banishment from his father's roof. The disgrace and the sorrow of it stung him with like keenness; for, though conscience and every instinct of his manhood had compelled him to retract or equivocate in nothing, he was filled with shame and grief over the cruel exposure to which all his most sacred feelings had been made subject, and the felonious attitude he was forced to assume before those elders in the faith whom he desired only to honor and obey.

Arthur had become interested in the trial at an early stage in its proceedings, and as it was held in a town not far distant from his own he was able to attend all the important sessions. He had noticed from the first, with unpleasant surprise, the conflict of feeling from which the accused seemed to suffer; how, instead of manifesting any resentful spirit at the arbitrary tone of his questioners, he seemed only humbly desirous to satisfy and agree with them. This submissive disposition was so plainly marked at times that Arthur grew tired and ashamed of it, standing

ready to pronounce it cowardice; when some sudden turn in affairs would show its owner in a new light, where, compelled by the ingeniously devised methods of his opponents, or his own outraged feeling, he would launch forth into a strong, manful defence of his position, thrilling the hearts of the outside listeners, who crowded the church to hear and applaud, and silencing for the moment, if not convincing, his judges.

Arthur was present when the vote was taken which formally withdrew from Henry Clifford all right of membership in the denomination he loved best. As he left the scene, carrying with him the image of that dejected figure and the sad, but resolute, face, his judgment wavered between pity and blame. The first was the stronger, however, and, as he said, he had felt the impulse to go up and speak to the condemned man; but he played with it so long, first rejecting it and then courting it, that it was easier at last to let it go. That Clifford was not friendless, and stood in no need of the sympathy of strangers, was manifest by the popular good-will shown him all through the trial. After the verdict many friends crowded about him to express their sympathy and assure him of their continued support and esteem. Arthur was also in some natural doubt as to how the overtures of the young radical preacher would be received, either by the ex-

pelled minister or by his friends. He had already become known in that locality as the pastor of a mixed congregation, made up of all types of unlicensed belief; who varied the use of the Bible in his pulpit with readings from Emerson and the Pagan scriptures, and put his office to other strange and unheard-of uses. His presence at the trial had been noticed in the local press, and his modesty was more than once put to the blush as he saw himself pointed out by one curious spectator to another. He had an uneasy feeling that his constant attendance at the trial helped to defeat the accused, serving as one of those impalpable causes of witness against him which can never be brought into the sworn testimony of such a case, but which float in the atmosphere and disturb the judgment more than those proofs which make up the actual evidence.

All thoughts of blame and criticism melted away as Arthur listened to the story of his new acquaintance, lying in the mountain's shadow whose distant peaks glowed in the setting sun, shedding a soft, reflected radiance over the spot where they rested. He was never inclined to harsh or hasty judgments of others, and he saw that Henry Clifford was not to be measured by those standards of faith and conduct which he felt bound to impose on himself. He could not but see also that, from the expelled young minister's

point of view, Clifford was right and his accusers were wrong, though his general position seemed as untenable and impracticable as that of moderate liberalism always appears to the pure rationalist.

"I know you think it very weak in me to care so much about it," Clifford said, reading his companion's thoughts in his face. "You wonder why, if I cannot accept the teachings of the Church, I do not leave it, as you have done. But the Church is wrong! That is not Methodism,"— an excited light gleaming in his eye,—"that dark, damning theology which parcels out the whole of mankind into two companies of saint and sinner, with Christ as avenging judge to condemn the larger half to everlasting torment. That is not what Wesley taught."

"But isn't it what grows naturally out of Wesleyism?" Arthur asked, softening the strong, inward opposition he felt to this kind of reasoning with a note of deprecation. "No form of faith is able to maintain the purity of its original conception. We have to judge every form, therefore, by its natural tendencies,—the promise of growth it contains. We may call it perverted growth if we like, but that doesn't help the matter much. Christianity must be judged in this way, as well as every other religion. We are more indebted to Augustine and Paul for our present system of belief than to Jesus, you know."

"No, I do not know that," the other replied. "But it is not 'systems' I care about," he added, rather inconsistently. "What are all the disputes of the doctors worth compared to a Life like that?"

"Ah, if you speak of the Life" —

"What else should I speak of? What is worth a moment's thought beside that? Once let the world get a vision of that Life, so simple, so tender, and so almighty, — so divine that it must have been God's own," — his voice sinking to a reverent whisper, — "and it will be healed of all its suffering and wrong-doing. That was what I wanted to do, to help the world see Him as He is, man's most loving Friend and Saviour; but they drove me out, and said I denied Him. It is they who deny Him," his voice quivering. "They said such doctrines were fit only for Universalists. Some even called me Unitarian, and said I should go where I belonged; but I belong there. What do I care for Universalism? It is the faith in which I was born that I love, only I wish to see it cleansed of its impurities, to take away the false, and show what is true. It is the Life I want to show them."

He spoke with tremulous earnestness, and ended in a tone of such mournful regret and longing that Arthur instinctively let a moment's silence intervene before he attempted a reply.

"Yes, I understand," he said at last, sympathetically. "That is a good thing to do; I don't say you have not a noble purpose. But, after all,"— his love of clear statement uppermost once more, —"you must remember that we know very little about 'the Life,' as you call it. It is only a scanty traditional account we have of Him, anyway; enough, doubtless, to lead us to believe that sometime there in Judea a great light shone out and passed quickly out of sight again. We know less of Jesus than of any other great religious leader, Buddha, Confucius, or Socrates"— He stopped, brought to a sudden pause in a line of reasoning he had pursued without reflection by the look of reproachful pain and surprise in his listener's face.

"Ah," the other sighed, "you do not believe in Him; I was afraid of that; I thought so when I read the sermon. It was all about God, to be sure, but God as a principle, something far off and unnecessary, except to man's thinking; an essential element in our poor human reasoning; a necessary 'datum of consciousness,' some philosopher calls it. But I find nothing to praise or value in such a conception of Deity. How can such a God feel the woes of his creatures, or desire to reconcile himself to them?"

"Perhaps the same end will be reached when man tries to reconcile himself to God."

"He cannot," was the earnest reply. "He is too weak and sinful, prone to wickedness Only divine help can restore him."

"Ah, well, we shall not agree there, of course," Arthur replied, with a touch of impatience. "According to our way of thinking, no such reconciliation between God and man is needed, because there has never been any real separation between them. You begin by separating the universe from God, and then require a miracle to bring them together again. We deny the separation, look on man's imperfections as the necessary means of growth, teach that ignorance is the worst form of wickedness, and trust to nature for the cure. So you didn't like my sermon?" bringing this brief and rather glib statement of his position to a close with an abrupt question, which threw the talk in another direction.

Clifford had listened to this exposition of the young radical's views with a disturbed face, venturing no reply to it, and answering only Arthur's last question.

"It interested me," he said, hesitatingly, "and helped me. I saw it was for the larger thought you were striving, and I liked it for that; but it left me feeling cold and forsaken. On the whole," — with that faint, fleeting smile of his, — "I was glad when I laid it down that it was time to go to prayer-meeting. It helped me, though," — in an

apologetic tone; — "it helped me. It made me want to hear you preach."

"That reminds me," said Arthur, "that I want you to preach for me, and soon, — I do not mean in exchange, you know," noting the other's embarrassment. "Then I should miss hearing you."

Clifford still hesitated. "I should like to come," he said at last, "and I am ashamed that I cannot insist on the exchange; but my people — I am afraid that they are not quite ready for it yet. We call ourselves the 'Independent Methodists,' but I sometimes think the name is a little too big for us. To be sure, though, our position is different."

"Oh, very different!" Arthur replied. "Your people naturally would not understand why you should ask a minister of my principles to speak for you, at the same time that they would be willing that you should speak for me; for, by that means "— with a curious smile —" some poor soul might be rescued from fatal danger. But my people "— lifting his head a little —" have given me a pulpit that is absolutely free. If I were to invite a Mohammedan to preach for me, or a Mormon, they would not think of objecting, though they might stay away. That is a privilege they take pretty often," with a sigh. "But they will not stay away when you come. They would rather hear you than the Mohammedan."

He spoke in a friendly tone, which served to atone for any disagreeable effect produced by his comparison. Arthur did not in the least wish to occupy his friend's pulpit, but it vexed him a little that the latter should have been afraid to ask him, and the temptation to show him the superior dignity and freedom of his own position was not to be set aside.

Clifford explained to Arthur how he had resumed preaching immediately after the trial, taking charge of a society organized for that purpose by his friends, and resting on a platform of modified dissent from the old faith and assent to the new. From a material point of view the young minister was in a better position than he could have hoped to win before, condemned to the wandering life and unstable fortunes of an itinerant ministry. The society was in a flourishing condition, and the minister drew large and interested audiences, but he was not satisfied, feeling himself a despised Pariah among the rest of the clergy, and leading a lonely life.

"I wanted to stay inside," he said to Arthur with his simple directness. "I am not like you. You could, of course, be happy only on the outside, but I have always found it easier to agree with people than to oppose them."

Arthur was by no means ready to accept the characterization of himself that these words im-

plied, but neither did he feel any present disposition to deny it by any word of personal defence or explanation. He was never communicative about himself, and just now was more interested in the affairs of his new acquaintance than his own. He fixed a near date for Clifford's visit to the Rapids, and this led to the latter asking him about his form of service.

Arthur explained that he made use of the usual service of readings, hymns, and prayer.

"Prayer!" the other repeated in surprise. "I didn't know you believed in"— He stopped in a little confusion. He was evidently puzzled to understand the nature of the petition that could be addressed to that idea of Deity set forth in the sermon he had read.

"We attach different meanings to the word," Arthur made undisturbed reply. "I do not believe in prayer as petition, of course, an asking for benefits, either spiritual or temporal. I should rather define prayer as aspiration, the receptive attitude of the soul towards its Maker."

The other bent a perplexed face to the ground. There could hardly have been a more unsatisfactory answer than this, and it troubled him also on another score. It seemed dishonest, a wilful quibbling with words and the ideas they represent.

It may be that Arthur did not feel altogether pleased with this answer himself, having often been forced to admit the loose and indeterminate character of the definitions in which he sought to clothe his thoughts on such matters, for he attempted a slight justification in a remark to the effect that it was impossible to prevent men from putting their own interpretations on such terms.

"Yes," his companion slowly assented; "but, then, you should not blame me for wishing to put my own interpretation on the doctrines of the Church."

Arthur colored a little. "That is true," he replied; "I do not blame you."

After a moment's silence Arthur turned to him with an abrupt question: "Are you married?" A look of distress swept over the other's face, which grew a little paler.

"No," he answered in a low voice. Then, after a moment's waiting, "She died, — died the day we were to have been married."

He covered his face with his hand, and Arthur reproached himself for his thoughtlessness, at the same time that he looked at his companion with a newly aroused interest.

"I have sometimes thought," the latter began, raising his head, "especially of late, since this trouble came upon me, that it was better so. At

least she did not live to see me publicly arraigned and condemned, cast out from them in disgrace. She was spared that."

A sudden gleam flashed from his listener's eyes. "You mean she would not have sympathized with you, — she would have blamed you, and placed herself beside your accusers? All women are like that."

As he let these words fall, the face of Rachel Armstrong seemed to shape itself out of the gathering twilight mists descending over the mountain, and to look at him with rebuking eyes, slowly fading out of sight again.

"She!" the other exclaimed in an indignant tone. "She not sympathize with me? She take sides with them? She was my guide and inspiration. It was she who was the first to catch the larger meaning of the things we believed together. Hers was the deep faith of the spirit. The doctrines were nothing to her. All her life she walked close to Him."

"But how can you be sure of that?" Arthur persisted. "That was when you were together and before anything had happened to disturb her confidence in you. Few women have courage to face the world in aid of an unpopular cause, especially when it concerns their religious belief. Women are naturally timid and superstitious in such things."

"She was not," was the answer. "She was afraid of nothing but wrong-doing."

Arthur let the topic drop. He was incredulous and a little irritated. It was not likely that this dead maiden was so superior in courage and womanly fidelity to the living. It was natural, he supposed, that her lover, looking back on her through the halo with which death covers its subjects, should think so, ascribing all manner of impossible virtues to her; but Arthur was in no mood to listen to a further description of them, and rose to his feet.

As the two made their way back to the village, a young man of boyish look crossed from the opposite side of the street. He seemed to recognize Arthur's companion, stepping forward as if to speak to him, then for some reason changing his mind and passing them in silence. Clifford, walking with bent head and hands clasped behind him, did not see him; but, though the waning daylight permitted only an indistinct glimpse of him, something in the boy's appearance struck Arthur and kept his image fastened in memory.

Clifford had ridden over to Richland from the neighboring town where he lived, on a visit to an old parishioner. Arthur accompanied him to the stable, where he mounted his horse, and the two men parted, each with the wish to retain the other in his future acquaintance. There was something

so incongruous in the image presented by the owner of the priestly face and costume, seated astride a young and rather spirited colt, that Arthur had some difficulty to repress a smile. It would have seemed more in keeping with the character and appearance of the rider if he had started to make his ten-mile journey on foot. Arthur found an artistic pleasure in the picture thus presented of his apostolic acquaintance, travelling on his errands of mercy and spiritual consolation across the barren stretches of country in that region, in pilgrim shoon, and staff in hand, like the Jesuit missionaries of a century ago.

CHAPTER XIX.

ARTHUR'S DISCOVERY.

BEHIND the bar-room of Potter's saloon was an eating-room and kitchen, which, with a few sleeping apartments above, were supposed to sanction the title of higher social respectability on the sign-board informing the public that this was Potter's Hotel, a name which none of the inhabitants ever remembered to make use of, though it was the only place of public accommodation in town.

As Arthur had no alternative, after eating his supper, between sitting in the bar-room and spending the evening out-of-doors, he chose the latter, the more willingly as the night was mild, and a full moon shed its rich light over everything, softening the ragged outlines of the little town into some measure of grace and harmony, and throwing the huge mountain peaks into bold relief against the clear sky.

He remained outside until a late hour, and on his return to the house would have been glad to retire at once to his room; but obeying the sharpened instinct of a recent comer to the West, and his minister's conscience, he refrained from show-

ing any feeling of superiority towards his unusual surroundings and paused to exchange a few words with his host. The latter stood before the rows of bottled shelves in his shirt-sleeves, dropping his elbows forward upon the counter in an easy attitude, when he found his guest disposed to talk. At the other end of the counter stood two men in a half-tipsy condition, and from behind the screen of green blinds near by could be heard the sound of shuffled cards and clinking coins and tumblers.

The landlord was greatly puzzled over his strange guest and his business in Richland, setting him down on his first arrival, when he had refused to "take something," as one of "them temperance fellows." He had decided by turns that Arthur was a geological student, an artist, and a civil engineer, as he watched him during the afternoon wandering aimlessly over the mountain, pausing to examine a rocky specimen now and then, or to bring a distant scenic effect into nearer view with his field-glass, and going over to watch the operations of the workmen engaged in sinking the shaft. All of these theories he felt compelled to abandon, one by one, as he stood behind the counter talking with him.

"You're a stranger in these parts?" he said; but Arthur replied that he did not consider himself a stranger, mentioning the place where he had been living nearly a year.

"Ah! a professional man I expect;" and Arthur, trying not to appear flattered, admitted that he was.

"I knew it," the other replied with a triumphant air, — "tell it by your looks and the way you talk," with an approving glance. "Waal, the West's a fust-rate place for lawyers — not many 'states to settle up p'raps, but plenty to lay out and" —

"I am not a lawyer," said Arthur, quietly; "I am a minister."

The landlord's jaw dropped as suddenly as a disabled nut-cracker, and a look of shame stole over his fat, red face; but he made an effort, and, straightening himself to an upright position, endeavored to compose his features into an expression of indifference.

"A minister? — Waal" — casting an embarrassed glance towards his two boozy customers, — "we don't see much of ministers here, that's a fact. Lookin' about for a place to start a camp-meetin,' I 'xpect. They gin'rally has 'em a mile further down the road, at a place called Saunder's Grove" —

Here Arthur interrupted him to say he had no such object.

"Waal, I haint no objection to the camp-meetins. The boys likes 'em too, — gives 'em a new kind of 'xcitement. Some on 'em git religion

reg'lar every year. I'm a believer in religion myself — member of a Methodis' Sunday-school when I was a boy. I keep a quiet and respectable house — Here, you Bill Garrett," — addressing some unseen person behind the screen who was angrily accusing another of unfairness, and enforcing his words with several oaths and a few heavy blows of his fist on the table, — "shet up that row, will you? And Silas Felton, you quit them tricks of yours and behave yourself like a gentleman." He was answered by a derisive laugh from the entire party from behind the screen, and Arthur, to spare his host's feelings and his own, took his lamp to go upstairs.

At that moment the outer door was flung open and a crowd of young men and boys entered, most of whom passed directly to the bar and called loudly for a drink, while two or three others went behind the screen. Among these was the one that had attracted Arthur's attention when he was on the street, and he remained standing in his place looking at him with a strong, questioning gaze that seemed to hold a silent force of its own, for, just before the boy disappeared behind the screen, he turned and looked full at Arthur in return, as if challenging the stranger's right to notice him. His face haunted Arthur after he went to his room and laid down on the hard bed to court, as well as he could, in the midst of his

strange surroundings, a little sleep. He fell into a light slumber at last, faintly disturbed all through by the discordant sounds from below, and raised to sudden and complete wakefulness at last by the noise of a violent dispute, in which it was easy to distinguish the loud and excited tones of Bill Garrett above all the rest. In a moment the words had grown to blows, followed by the sound of a sharp scuffle, which ended in a pistol-shot and a woman's scream. A fearful silence filled the next half minute, broken by the frightened voice of one of the men.

"My God! he's killed the boy."

By this time Arthur had hurriedly dressed and was descending the stairs, some sure instinct telling him that it was the boy he had stopped to look at, and when he reached the bar-room he was not surprised to see him lying pale, and apparently lifeless, on the floor.

A woman, one of the kitchen servants, was supporting his head; and another, who had brought warm water and a sponge, knelt by his side, washing the blood from a dangerous-looking wound, which, beginning perilously near the temple, had cut its way backward like an ugly gash along the surface of the skull. A tall, black-bearded man was kneeling on the other side with his head bent close to the boy's breast and holding his wrist in his hand.

"He's alive," he said, a moment after, raising his face with a look of glad relief. "He's only fainted. Fetch some brandy, landlord! Don't you let that infarnal sneak git away from you, boys," glancing sharply towards the corner where two or three of the younger men stood guard around another, whom they had bound to a chair, and whose face wore a look of vixenish hatred and rage coupled with craven fear.

The crowd had given way respectfully at Arthur's approach, who placed himself at Bill Garrett's side and examined the boy's condition carefully, searching his face closely the while to establish the likeness it continued to suggest to some one he had known before. Bill Garrett forced a few spoonfuls of brandy down his throat, and the boy opened his eyes, fastening them with an unmeaning gaze on Arthur, still kneeling at his side, then wearily closing them again; while Bill Garrett, at this sign of returning consciousness, gave vent to a joyful shout that made the air vibrate, and drew upon him a rebuke from one of the women.

Something in the expression of the eyes thus briefly fastened upon him strengthened without clearing Arthur's former impressions. "Who is this boy?" he asked, looking up at the landlord.

"His name's Armstrong, — Dick Armstrong,"

the latter made hesitating answer, as if doubtful of the motive underlying this question.

"Richard Armstrong!" Arthur exclaimed, springing to his feet. A dozen questions rushed to his lips, but a quick second thought restrained him. There was no need to ask anything further, as it required but a single glance, in the light of the information already received, to confirm the boy's identity; especially as he had again opened his eyes, to turn them this time towards his friend, Bill Garrett, with the same troubled, appealing look which Arthur had so often noticed in Rebecca Meredith. There could be no doubt that this was the deacon's long-lost son, whom a merciful or ironical destiny had thrown across his path. Arthur had no time to collect his thoughts nor to perfect any plans, but when he spoke it was with an accent of authority that had a charmed effect on his listeners.

"I know this boy," he said. "He comes from the same town that I do, and I am well acquainted with his family. I will take charge of him. As soon as he is able to be removed I shall take him home with me."

These words were answered by a murmur of approval from the little circle about him, and the landlord took occasion to whisper to one or two standing near him who the stranger was, in a

manner intended to convey great credit to himself for the distinction of such a guest.

Arthur helped the women to bind up the wounded head as well as they could, while they waited for the doctor, summoned from the next town, to arrive, consulting with them as to how a bed could be made up in one of the lower rooms until the boy was able to be removed. Bill Garrett watched these proceedings with a darkening brow.

"Excuse me, stranger," he said, at length, with attempted jocularity, to cover the irritation beneath, "but aint you making ruther free with other folks' property? I don't call Dick Armstrong my property, 'xactly, but I consider I've got the fust call to take care of him. Ask the boys here — they'll tell you he's been a kind o' protegy of mine for about six years now, and" —

"You are the man who shot him just now; accidentally, I have no doubt," said Arthur, turning quietly towards him.

"See here, mister, just take them words back, will you?" the other replied, stepping towards Arthur with a threatening air. "I haint no more likely to be firin' pistol-shots at Dick Armstrong than you be. When I do any shootin' I choose a diff'rent kind o' mark," pointing at the miserable-looking wretch in the corner. "Ask that damned cur who shot Dick Armstrong."

Arthur was equally astonished and ashamed over this discovery. There was an honest ring to Garrett's rough tones and a touch of generous feeling in his allusion to his young friend that awoke his admiration.

"Then I have wronged you, and I am sorry. I sincerely beg your pardon."

There was another murmur of admiring applause through the crowd, while Bill Garrett flushed and looked a little foolish as he took the hand Arthur extended to him. At the same time the prisoner in the corner broke into an enraged and whimpering cry, declaring that he "didn't never want to hurt the boy, but if he was such a blamed fool as to throw himself in the way, why, of course, he'd git hurt, and nobody to thank for it but himself, neither."

"Is that true?" Arthur asked Garrett, in a low voice, and the latter nodded, pulling roughly at his collar, as if something had come up in his throat just then to choke him. "What did he do that for?" Arthur asked in a surprise that displaced for the moment a finer tact.

The other gave a meaningless laugh. "I don't wonder you ask, stranger. I don't look wuth anybody's flinging himself in front of to save from a shot like that, do I?" glancing down at the wounded sufferer on the floor; and again Arthur felt ashamed and constrained to beg his pardon.

"But it'll go a hundred times harder with him for this," Garrett burst out again. "He p'inted his pistol at me, true enough; but he seed the boy plain as he does now, afore he fired, and the sight of him put another dev'lish thought in his head. I could see it in his eye. He knowed I cared a heap more for the boy than for any damned old carcass of mine. Killin's too good for such as him. Don't think you won't git it, though," turning fiercely towards him again. "The Lord'll think the better of the man who rids the yarth of sech varmin as ye be."

Arthur felt that he was neither so shocked nor displeased at this outburst of vindictive passion as he ought to have been; but he tried to stem the current of the injured man's wrath by calling attention to the boy, and the women, entering just then to say that the bed was ready, they lifted him carefully and carried him to it. A moment after, the arrival of the constable and the removal of his prisoner caused a fresh excitement in the outer room. Bill Garrett rushed from the bedside to the door to offer himself as principal witness for the prosecution in the coming trial, and to beg the constable to subpœna him at once. Then, with the placid mien of one who has accomplished his full duty, he returned to his post by Arthur's side, whose rightful share in the care of the injured boy he no longer questioned.

"You've ben hurt, Dick," he said, bending over the bed, in response to a feeble question from its occupant as to where he was, who had opened his eyes and was gazing around at his new surroundings with a perplexed look.

"'Twas that sneak Felton that done it, and if the court don't stretch him up for it I will — but there," in obedience to an admonitory gesture from Arthur, "I haint goin' to 'xcite you. The doctor'll be here in a few minutes and fix ye up all right. Me and this gentleman here's goin' to take care of ye. He's a stranger, so there haint no use interdoosin' him," with a wink to Arthur to inform him of the joke. He then gave the boy another spoonful of the brandy, and bade him doze away and make himself comfortable. Removing the light, he and Arthur seated themselves just outside the door in the now quiet bar-room to wait for the doctor. The landlord, with a mind a little excited by the evening's event, but with a conscience unimpaired by any sense of complicity, came in to inform them that lunch had been laid out in the dining-room, after which he bade them good-night and left them together.

Seated in the dimly lighted bar-room of Potter's saloon, with Bill Garrett for companion, Arthur heard the story of Richard Armstrong's life during the last six years. Though compelled to listen to much that displeased him, and to measure every-

thing that he heard by a very different standard from that unconsciously presented by the speaker, it was with great relief that Arthur was able to conclude at last that the deacon's son had led an idle and wandering life rather than one desperately wicked. There were few irregular methods of earning a livelihood, in that loose and unsettled state of society in which Bill Garrett lived, that his charge had not become familiar with, yet he still retained the look and bearing of one who prefers to get his bread by honest means, though his definition of that term, like Garrett's, might have differed from Arthur's. There was an innocent look about the brow and eyes, and an engaging candor in young Armstrong's manner towards those he liked, which the most degrading circumstances had little power to affect, and which made him everywhere plenty of friends, though he seemed to care but little for them, attaching himself to a few whom he selected without regard to their position or reputation, and hung about with a dog-like faithfulness and readiness to serve.

Bill Garrett stood first among these, and in Arthur's presence seemed about equally proud and ashamed of the relation in which he stood to his young charge.

"I took a likin' to the boy," he explained in an apologetic tone, "and he, — waal, the little cuss seemed to take a likin' to me; and after that little

affair at Santyfay, ther' warn't no gittin' rid of him. I know what you're thinkin', sir. The landlord says you're a parson, and I know parsons don't look at things like the rest of us;" his tone of general approval being qualified with a touch of pity just here. "You think I'm a mighty poor sort for a boy like that to tie to, and I guess you're about right there."

"What was the little affair at Santa Fé?" Arthur asked.

"Oh, that warn't nothin'!" the other replied, with a careless shrug of his shoulders. "Any decent feller'd 'a done the same."

The substance of the story was that when Bill Garrett and his friend Dick were in the place mentioned, and but slightly known to each other, the latter had come near serving a term in the penitentiary by ignorantly playing into the hands of a couple of practised rogues from San Francisco, who, with a large burglary scheme on hand, had shrewdly contrived to implicate him in their plans. When the plot was discovered Dick was arrested as an accomplice, while the two thieves would have escaped entirely had not Garrett, who had suspected their game from the first, and kept a sharp watch on them, come in at the last moment, with dramatic promptness and effect, to witness against them, and save the boy. There was nothing remarkable in the story, nor especially

heroic in the action of the one who told it, and it did not diminish Arthur's desire to break up a relation which such an experience had established. He began to understand though, that this might be more difficult than he had at first supposed, and that unless he could secure Garrett's influence he was not likely to accomplish the desire which had already taken strong possession of him.

It was easy to gather from the latter's story that he knew almost nothing of young Armstrong's early history, — a circumstance that pleased Arthur, but which he was at a loss to account for, not knowing whether to attribute it to indifference or to a finer feeling of reserve. Garrett finished his story by repeating the hint of an apology he had thrown out before for the way in which he seemed to stand in the boy's light.

"I've knowed all along he'd ought to be out of this," he said; "I'm too tough a customer to git out of it myself, even if I wanted to, which I aint never sure of, except when I see a clean-lookin' grammar-kind-o'-talkin' chap like yourself, which makes me wish for a minute I'd begun different;" fetching a heavy, but Arthur did not know how sincere a sigh from his broad chest. "But Dick aint too old to git out, and by the old Hokey! he's got to do it. Just you say the word, parson, what you want him to do, and I'll stand by and see it done."

Arthur was as much embarrassed as gratified by this unexpected offer of help from such a source. There was a rough sincerity in Garrett's look and manner which he felt bound to recognize by a little responsive confidence on his own part, but which did not allay a feeling of dim distrust and foreboding. The circumstances under which he had made acquaintance with Garrett, and his self-related history, told along with the story of Dick Armstrong, was sufficient to account for these feelings. It was neither of these, however, that gave rise to Arthur's strongest fears, which were rather caused by his companion's manner, his restless movements, and the wandering eyes that went roaming aimlessly about the room while he talked, even while he was making his loudest asseverations of repentance. Arthur would have taken romantic pleasure in an adventure of this kind which should include the discovery and regeneration of a moral barbarian like Garrett; but imagination was forced to yield to reason, and he said distinctly to himself that Garrett was not a man to be trusted, at the same time that he owned the necessity of seeming to trust him so long as his words or behavior held out the least chance. For the boy's sake he must share and bolster up Garrett's wavering, half-pretended belief in himself, and show a friendly disposition towards him; but even as he formed this resolution the strange,

superstitious dread he had experienced before swept over him, and he felt it was far from being an unmixed good he was to reap from this new relation.

The doctor came in while they were talking, and, after examining the boy's injury and dressing the wound after professional methods, gratified Arthur with the opinion that, unless unfavorable symptoms set in, his patient could be removed in a day or two. It was arranged that Garrett should accompany them both to Elk Rapids; and a few nights later the deacon's son slept in Arthur's bed. As the latter stood looking down on him in his sleep he wondered if Rachel Armstrong would be more pleased or offended at what he had done, and found it impossible to conjecture how this discovery of her brother would affect their present relation or her feelings towards him. Her father would probably think his son had fallen into as dangerous a pitfall of error and temptation in the hands of the heretic minister as with Bill Garrett and his associates. Would she think so too?

CHAPTER XX.

AN EXCHANGE OF GUARDIANS.

RICHARD ARMSTRONG'S wound proved less serious than was at first supposed, and he was able to leave his bed in a few days and lie upon the couch in Arthur's study. While they were gratified at this speedy recovery of their patient, both Arthur and Bill Garrett would have cheerfully submitted to a longer period of convalescence, the former for the opportunity such indoor confinement would have given him to gain better acquaintance with his new charge, and, as he hoped, to prepare the way for securing a friendly influence over him; and the latter for the chance it would have afforded for accumulating heavy legal damages against the criminally intentioned Felton. Grateful as Garrett was for his friend's escape, it was a life-long disappointment to him that he was not able to witness against Silas Felton for manslaughter, and thus assist in his summary execution; the latter receiving, as it was, only a year's sentence, with hard labor, in the penitentiary.

When Arthur Forbes explained to young Armstrong who he was, and why he had brought him

home, the latter listened with a downcast and rather sullen look on his features, yielding short answers to the questions that were put to him, and maintaining for the most part an obstinate silence, which his host did not seem to notice. He did not remember Arthur at first, the latter being so much older, and absent from home during the last few years of Richard's stay in Dennison; but one day while he lay on the lounge, watching Arthur writing at his desk, his face took on a more attentive look for a few moments, at the end of which he gave utterance to a sudden remark.

"I know you now; you lived in the big brick house on the corner, a square above our house; and weren't you a little sweet on my sister Rachel?"

Arthur had turned in surprise when the boy began to speak, thinking him asleep, and a deep flush covered his face at the last words, but receded again as he laid down his pen and looked at him.

"Yes, I know you now," the boy repeated, returning this look with one of idle contemplation. A moment after, and in the same careless tone, he spoke again: "I liked my sister Rebecca the best." Arthur repressed the quick retort which rose to his lips and waited to hear what should follow.

"She was always good to me, Rebecca was; she used to give me money to spend Fourth of July, and such times, and help me out when I got in a scrape; but Rachel was always blaming and preaching to me, like the old man."

"The old man?" Arthur repeated. "Oh, you mean your father; but very likely your sister thought you deserved reproof."

"I s'pose so; but 'twant no use," was the reply, turning his face to the wall.

Arthur, who was anxious above everything else to win the boy's confidence, would not risk offending him by further reproof. Though he was displeased with him for this criticism of his sister, and found in it a new obstacle to the end he sought, he was more discouraged at the entire absence of regret and affection manifest in the young man's tone and manner. He began to fear that here was one of those most difficult cases to deal with, where a moral apathy seems to have settled over all the faculties and dulled the natural affections. Indifference is often a harder thing to cure than the active forms of vice, where the force of resistance to good may, by skilful management, be changed to an opposite one in its behalf; and Arthur felt that if he was to gain any influence in this quarter at all it would be at the cost of much self-repression and an infinite patience. Suppressing his disappointment, he partly turned the

subject by asking the boy whether he would not like to see the pictures of his sisters.

"I don't mind," was the answer. At this encouraging response Arthur selected a photograph from a number of others lying on a Japanese tray on the mantel, and handed it to him.

"That's Rebecca," said the boy, with a little show of pleased interest, as he took the picture and looked at it a few moments. "She was always good to me," he repeated, handing the card back to Arthur.

"Once she took me away to her own home where her husband lived, and they treated me first-rate. If I could have lived there I shouldn't have run away, perhaps."

Arthur felt a return of his old hopelessness at that last word; but he said nothing, silently handing him another picture he had taken, with some hesitation, from a drawer in his desk, and enclosed in a small locket case, such as acknowledged lovers exchange with each other.

"Why, that's a woman!" the boy exclaimed; then, as a flush of guilty recollection colored his cheek, "She was only a girl at that time."

Arthur's memory travelled quickly back. The picture her brother held in his hand was taken several years after he left home, at which time Rachel was just passing the age of girlhood, a period Arthur remembered clearly enough, recall-

ing, with a new sense of loss and longing, the image of the fair, serious-faced maiden, who, even then, had made her place secure in his boyish fancy.

It was evident that the picture of his second sister interested Richard much less than the other, though something in the dainty case and the separate care in which it was kept by the owner caught his attention, and recalled the line of association by which he had traced his first recollection of Arthur. He continued to hold it in his hand, looking curiously from it up to the latter, who stood near. Arthur, reading the question in his face, seated himself near the couch.

"Yes, Dick, you were quite right;" he chose to call the boy by the name with which he was most familiar. "I was very fond of your sister, and there is no one in the world I think so much of. We were to have been married, but she grew displeased with me and sent me away. But it makes no difference, I shall always love her."

His auditor had turned a pair of dark, attentive eyes on him; he had the eyes of a seraph, large, limpid, and clear, with the same look of unintelligent innocence, into which he tried to summon some expression of sympathy, but the subject was remote from his understanding. He knew nothing of love, nor of the tangled web of hope, passion, and despair, that obscures and obstructs

that divine feeling. Through all the rude experiences of the last few years, in which he had come into contact with every form of vice and lawless appetite, he seemed to have kept an imagination singularly pure and unsullied.

"I am sorry, sir;" he seemed to think he must say something. "It's queer too; I should think you would just suit a girl like Rachel. She was always so religious, and your being a minister"—

"I cannot explain it to you," the other interrupted him, "and it isn't necessary; but I am glad you know it. Never say anything against your sister Rachel to me," he added more earnestly.

"Oh, I aint got nothing against her!" the boy replied.

"And now you understand," Arthur went on laying his hand on the other's arm, "why I feel such a strong interest in you, and want to be friends with you."

The other moved uneasily on his couch and bent a disturbed look downward on the patchwork quilt which covered him. He did not wish to act in a representative capacity for any member of the family he had deserted, and he had a suspicion that Arthur's words were meant to commit him to something unpleasant.

"What do you want me to do," he asked in a resentful tone,—"to go back to Dennison? If that's it I may as well tell you now that I don't

intend to do it." He spoke with some excitement, but his words were more disrespectful than his tone.

"The first thing I want you to do is to get well and not excite yourself with useless fancies," said Arthur, putting his hand on the boy's flushed forehead. "I don't care about your going back to Dennison, — at least not yet. You are a man now, and must take care of yourself, and there are better chances to do that here than there."

He spoke as if there had been nothing in his companion's past life to contradict the assumption that he also desired to enter upon some honest and self-supporting employment as soon as possible. "Mr. Garrett and I have been discussing your prospects," Arthur went on, in the same unconscious manner, "and when you are well we will talk them over together."

The boy looked up in surprise and some discomfiture at this confident mention of his old companion, whose name he was not wont to hear brought forward to confirm the interests of law and order. These feelings deepened on the occasion of his first interview with Garrett himself.

"Yes, Dick," the latter said, one morning, when they sat alone in Arthur's study. "Me and Mr. Forbes is of the same opinion; it's time for you to settle down."

He spoke with attempted ease, but not without

the betrayal of some embarrassment in the restless eyes, which went wandering about the room from one object to another. "You've got to settle down sometime, you know. It's settle down in this world or settle up in the next." Garrett was one of those whom landlord Potter had in mind when he spoke of the boys who got religion once a year.

"When you git to be an old sinner like me your chance to do the fust is pretty much gone by. Now, here's a man stands ready to be your friend and to give you a hand, and my advice is, 'grab it.' You owe it to your family, Dick," in a solemn tone. "He's ben a-tellin' me 'bout 'em, 'bout the deacon and your two sisters — nice, grown-up girls like them. Yes, you must stay here along with him. Anyway," as the boy's face darkened into an obstinate frown, "you can't go galivantin' all over God's country with me no longer."

"So, then," cried the other, angrily, "you want to get rid of me?"

"You know what for, Dick," in a persuasive tone. "Come, now, I put it to you fair, which would you rather be like, him or me?"

"You," the boy replied, looking his friend fearlessly in the eye.

"Um-m, waal — me as you see me now, p'raps," crossing one long leg over the other with

a gratified air. "But how 'bout when you see me on them sprees — which you know, Dick," in the same argumentative tone he might have employed to convince his listener of some especial merit, "I'm bound to go on 'em once in 'bout so often? Seems as if I had a tearin' devil inside me that had got to git loose somehow. How 'bout them times, Dick?"

The boy hung his head.

"I thought so," the other said with melancholy triumph. "Now, see here, Dick, I pulled you through at Santyfay, and, though I don't say it to boast, it's right you should be grateful; but he'll save you from wuss things than Santyfay, — everlastin' torment, mebbe. He's plucked you like a brand from the burnin'" —

"The burning!" cried his companion, scornfully; "do you think I believe that stuff? I heard enough of that when I was at home. I don't believe he believes it either."

"Mebbe you don't believe it, and mebbe he don't, but that won't hinder none of us from gittin' it; and burnin' or no burnin' there's other things as bad, and he believes in them. There's ruin and disgrace in this world growin' bigger and bigger every day; and there's knowin' you're nothin' but a vagabon' and big bully and rowdy, and despisin' yourself fur it; and then sellin' yourself a dozen times beforehand to the devil to forgit

that he's goin' to close out an everlastin' mortgage on ye bimeby."

A more critical listener to this outburst might have thought it a little too rhetorical, but to the present one the eloquence seemed born of honest passion, and Dick Armstrong looked at his friend with the utmost astonishment. Was it possible that the reckless, boisterous Bill Garrett ever felt like this?

"And now you've heard what I've got to say, Dick. Mr. Forbes has got a good place fur ye in Mr. Hunt's store, and you just hang onter him."

"Where are you going?" the boy asked quickly.

"Going back to the ranche to look after the sheep, and give the old Harry the slip, if I can," he added in a lower tone.

Dick knew what that meant, and looked up at his friend with a pitying and appealing face. He knew that the other was beginning to feel the stealthy approach of his old enemy; that the craving thirst for drink, the desire to give free rein to this appetite, and let himself loose in one of his periodic fits of unbridled license and excess, was coming over him again. Unlike most moderate drinkers, who defend their particular habit with the immunity from excess which they claim to be thus purchased, Garrett was subject to such attacks, when a delirious frenzy seemed to possess him and he passed days, and sometimes

weeks, in a drunken orgy. At such times his inflammable temper, excited to madness by the most trivial cause, often led him to commit acts of reckless violence, and made him a dangerous companion to either friend or foe. The season for one of these regularly returning sprees was approaching, and he wanted to get out of sight; perhaps he honestly desired to get back to his ranche and escape the deadly temptations of the town.

It would be hard to say whether Garrett's determination to make Dick stay with his new acquaintance was the result of moral conviction and a desire for the boy's welfare, or arose from the vainer wish to display his authority. Probably there was a mixture of both motives. To Arthur, when he parted from him, Garrett said, trying to subdue a too triumphant sense of his own importance, "He'll stay, sir; I've giv' him his orders. He won't like it much, and he'll be a little sulky perhaps; but he'll stay."

Arthur doubted the salutary effect of his staying under such circumstances, though he was glad of this result, and thanked Garrett for the assistance he had rendered. "I don't suppose I could have persuaded him to remain without your help," he said.

"Waal, sir, it mayn't be becomin' in me to say so, but I don't suppose you could. I s'pose, sir,

if I was to hold up my little finger," — raising one of those members, roughly skinned and not very clean, — " all your coaxin' and persuadin' wouldn't keep him from follerin' wherever that little finger happened to p'int. I don't s'pose 'twould, sir." He spoke in a tone that mingled considerate sympathy for Arthur and his slight influence, with conscious pride in his own power, and a magnanimous determination not to exert it.

" I am afraid that is true," Arthur replied, with a discouraged accent. " All I can say, then, Mr. Garrett, is, — don't hold up your little finger."

" I won't, sir," the other said, straightening his figure proudly. " You may trust Bill Garrett, — except when the old Harry's got him," he added under his breath. He lifted his slouch hat with that touch of cavalier grace and sentiment which seems part of the inheritance of the new civilization of the West, even under its most uncivilized conditions, and went out from the minister's presence, leaving town that same day.

Arthur's letter to Mrs. Meredith telling her of the discovery of her brother and the accident that had brought him to his own acquaintance was answered at once. Mrs. Meredith wrote in the most friendly and grateful terms and ended by urging Arthur to write again. This he did, and they had corresponded at frequent intervals ever since. The deacon, too, had written a

short letter expressing a general and rather lofty sense of obligation, intended to impart no sentiment of pardon for the injuries he had received, either at the hands of his disobedient son or the latter's present guardian, and leaving Arthur with the feeling that he was held in greater distrust than before. This letter was accompanied with one to his son, a much longer composition, covering several pages, which the boy read a part of and then flung aside, refusing to answer it. The letters which his sister Rebecca began to send him once or twice a week were read several times over and carefully preserved, though it was a long time before he would consent to write to her in return. They were letters full of pleasant sisterly gossip about his old mates and acquaintances, with news of the village where he was born and anecdotes of the children, who always sent their love to Uncle Richard, — letters which insensibly drew the boy's heart back to his home and the memories of his childhood.

His younger sister, Rachel, did not write to him. Arthur thought he understood the reason of this silence; but her brother, who had expected nothing from that source, gave himself no trouble to reflect on the subject. One day, two or three weeks after Richard's recovery, a letter came to Arthur addressed in a handwriting which made his heart leap. It was more than enough at first to

hold it tightly clasped in his hand, while, forgetting all his other errands, he hastily turned his steps homeward again, assuring himself from time to time, by a brief, hungry glance, that the letter was really there, and the same he had gained that happy, startled recognition of at first.

Shutting himself in his room and looking at the written address he raised it to his lips and then with trembling fingers opened the letter. It proved to be the smallest and driest possible morsel of a letter, a half-dozen lines, prompted by the writer's vigilant sense of justice, and sent to thank Arthur, her brother's rescuer, for the interest he had shown in the latter. With a punctilious desire to avoid any form of speech that could possibly mislead, she had gone to the other extreme, absurdly addressing her correspondent as "Dear Sir," and signing herself "Respectfully yours" at the end. All this had no power, however, to diminish Arthur's happiness and sense of triumph in receiving it. He read the little starched epistle a dozen times, dwelling with keen delight on the neat, finical turn of each of the small, cramped letters. He understood the writer so well that he could read each carefully weighed and troubled motive that had entered into this letter; the shamed reluctance and pride that continually held her back from such a task, while a merciless sense of duty

prodded her on. Where a different kind of lover would have been deeply hurt over the marked coldness of such a missive, Arthur saw in it the witness of that pure maidenliness, combined with high, unshrinking courage, which he had always worshipped. He kissed the written lines again and again, supplying all the tenderness they lacked with his own warmth. Cold she might be, but she could never be unlike herself. He would not have her less stanch and loyal, even to win her back; and so long as she was true to herself she could never be wholly untrue to him. Strange reasoning for a lover perhaps, but Arthur Forbes and Rachel Armstrong were a singular young couple.

The reasoning of even such a lover as this, however, will reach a personal conclusion at last, and it was impossible for Arthur to resist or argue down the new strong feeling of hope that took possession of him. All that day he deliberately gave himself up to being happy. He wrote several letters in reply to the one he had received, pouring his whole heart out in the first, and covering a dozen sheets with a lover's praises and entreaties. With his mind thus relieved, he was able to write a second of mere friendship, cheerful and kind, with only an escaping word or two to reveal the passion of the first. Unable to send the first of these, and dissatisfied with the second,

he wrote a short note, almost as cold and formal as her own. Then he tore up all three, taking his pen to try once more. A knock at the door interrupted him, and, opening it, he saw Daniel Hunt, and read in his face, before he heard it, the story of some accident or misfortune to Richard Armstrong. In the hurried events which followed, the letter he had received was never answered.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN ACCIDENT.

OUT of respect for the peculiar views of the deacon and a proud determination to incur no chance of reproach in that quarter, Arthur did not seek the help of any of his congregation in the care of Richard Armstrong, but went at once to Daniel Hunt, who, in addition to his connection with an Orthodox church, was president of the Young Men's Christian Association, and public representative of the charitable activities of that community.

Hunt at once showed a warm interest in his new charge, and, under the influence of this friendly feeling, made a place for him in his store; while Arthur procured lodgings for Richard near his own, resisting the impulse to keep him under the same roof with himself, that he might not seem to assume too close a guardianship over him. For a time the new order of things worked smoothly enough, Armstrong falling into his place in the store and performing the duties assigned him, not, indeed, with enthusiasm, nor the greatest industry, but with apparent willingness to learn and to please his new friends. Through

the influence of his employer he even went to church occasionally, sometimes to that which Hunt attended, and sometimes to hear Arthur. At the latter place he listened with a curious and puzzled countenance and a look of questioning intelligence, which Arthur could not but notice and reflect upon.

"I never heard any one preach like you," Richard said to him one day, as they were walking home after the morning service.

"Indeed?" Arthur replied, with a smile. "I hope you don't dislike my way of preaching?"

"N-no," was the hesitating response. "What I mean is, you expect us to do it all ourselves. That aint the way the camp-meeting fellows talk. They say we can't do nothing ourselves; that's what my father used to say too. Then there's Mr. Clifford; he talks more as you do, but not just like you either. He believes in Christ."

"Do you know Mr. Clifford?" Arthur asked, in surprise. Receiving an affirmative answer, he learned, by further questioning, that his young charge had once been brought under Clifford's influence, in company with a few idle companions, for whose assistance to a better way of living the latter had opened a reading-room, organizing a young men's club among them, called "The Helpers." He afterwards learned from Clifford

himself that Richard had been a rather promising member of this band, but drifted away from it through his attachment to Bill Garrett and his wandering life.

"What makes you think I don't believe in Christ?" Arthur asked, coming back to another point in their talk, and frankly curious to know the impression his preaching made in a quarter like this.

"Because you talk so little about him," the boy made candid reply.

"I thought I talked a good deal about him this morning," Arthur answered. He had preached a sermon on "The Ethics of Christianity."

"Yes, but not the way Mr. Clifford does. You think he was a man just like the rest of us."

"No, Dick, not just like the rest of us," was the quick reply, spoken in an earnest tone, "much better and wiser in every way;" and he went on to explain his views on this subject, taking pains to put his thoughts in as simple language as possible; but even while he spoke he was oppressed with the difficulty of his task. How could he present the plain but remote principles of modern liberalism to this untaught mind, so that they should take as strong hold on his will and imagination as the old ideas of sin and judgment? Was it true, he asked himself despondently, that the religion he taught was fitted only to the needs of

the virtuous and cultured classes of society? Had rationalism no message for a world hardened with ignorance and wrong-doing? This boy at his side, not vicious nor sin-hardened as yet, but culpably indifferent to everything but the gratification of the moment, how could he be startled from his mood of lazy self-content by an appeal to reason? Was Tom right, and could such natures be saved only through those imaginative terrors evoked by the old preaching, or that religious sentimentalism which Clifford taught? The image of the latter brought him back to the immediate subject of his thought.

"Well, then," he said, with forced cheerfulness, "if you like Clifford's preaching better than mine you will be glad to know that he is going to preach for me next Sunday; and that reminds me, Dick" —

"I didn't say I liked his preaching better than yours," the boy replied. "I don't care much about preaching, any way."

This was not more encouraging, but without noticing it Arthur went on. "That reminds me," he repeated, "that your father would probably be better pleased if you went with Mr. Hunt to church. He does not believe as I do, you know; and your sister, she would doubtless agree with your father."

"Rebecca!" exclaimed the boy. "She would

want me to go with you. She does nothing but praise you in her letters."

Arthur was silent, and did not urge his point further. It was not Rebecca he was thinking of, nor was this the first time he had had occasion to notice the slight impression which the boy retained of his younger sister.

On the whole, Richard was as contented with his present surroundings, barring the necessity of work, as with his former independent but insecure mode of life; which, however it may once have attracted him, was beginning to make its practical discomforts more plainly felt at the time when Arthur found him. The habits of indolent reliance on others and idle irresponsibility were so marked in young Armstrong's character that Arthur wondered what had become of the boy, whose uncontrollable spirit had led him to run away from home and refuse the protection of his natural guardians.

He should have remembered there is no cure for a lawless will like absolute freedom to pursue its own way. As frequently happens in such cases the wild and turbulent spirit, which led Richard to revolt against every form of control in his early years, had become blunted through disuse and the absence of all occasion to employ and profit by it in the untrammelled life he had since led. The nature of such seeming marked self-reliance, when

left to itself, instead of developing that quality into a complete knowledge and mastery of self, had grown into one lazily dependent on the first supporting prop that offered itself.

Thus the sustaining influence and presence of Bill Garrett being withdrawn, Richard, with little difficulty, and untroubled by any thought of the difference between them, adjusted himself to his new relations with Arthur, feeling about the same degree of personal unaccountability in the one case as in the other.

How long this peaceful state of affairs would last, Arthur was unable to conjecture, for, though there was a frank guilelessness in the boy's manner to himself, who manifested a willingness to obey where obedience cost little, Arthur felt the presence of a large element of reserve in his nature, which often took the more painful guise of an entire lack of moral conviction. With his handsome looks and placid disposition Richard Armstrong combined an almost conscienceless nature beneath, reminding Arthur of the beautiful pagan youths he had read of, who passed their days in idyllic ease and enjoyment, with Bacchic wreaths on their heads. So far as Richard Armstrong was to be governed at all, it must be through his affections. He was one who inspired a quick, admiring affection in others, and Arthur soon came to feel an interest in him on his own

account, and longed at times for some crowning event or circumstance that should put this feeling to the test, and gain for him as secure place in the boy's regard as Bill Garrett had won.

This jealous dread, though it deserves a better name, of Bill Garrett and his influence was changed into sharp anxiety when Arthur met that worthy on the street one day a few weeks after his departure.

With heroic pains, which no one would give him much credit for now, Garrett had staved off the murderous appetite that had pursued him like a fiend, only suddenly and unreservedly to yield to it at last; and he was in the first stage of jovial but conscious inebriation when he met Arthur. He made a ridiculous effort to straighten his swaying figure and to collect his scattered senses.

"It's all right, parson," he said to Arthur, who, heedless of appearances, had stopped to speak to the drunken man, and, if possible, get him away to some place of refuge. "It's all right," he repeated, with a reeling motion; "you didn't 'xpec' see me I know, but you needn' be 'fraid of Bill Garrett, parson. He's on the squar' — he aint goin' near the boy. Don't you be 'fraid, parson — we're all on the squar'."

Arthur, struck with a cold fear and dislike, struggled with these feelings and tried to quiet his noisy companion and get him away from his pres-

ent surroundings in front of a large saloon, where they were both becoming the objects of some curiosity and mirth on the part of the bystanders. Garrett, just conscious enough of his condition to resent the knowledge of it in others, grew surly and a little violent as Arthur continued to urge him to come with him, and an unpleasant scene was imminent, when the sheriff came up and, whispering a word in Arthur's ear, counselled him to leave. Arthur had no choice but to obey, especially as his presence, now that Garrett's drunken suspicions were aroused, seemed to make things worse instead of better.

This little encounter took place near nightfall the day before he received Rachel Armstrong's letter. He went at once to the store to tell Hunt what had happened and to put him on his guard; but the latter had gone to supper, and he was obliged to wait his return. Richard was in the back part of the store, and Arthur went over to speak to him, but not of Garrett's return, which was something he desired to keep from the boy's knowledge.

"Come over to my study after you shut up the store this evening, will you?" he asked, putting an arm about the young man's shoulder, and speaking with more earnestness than so simple a request warranted, and which he feared would betray him. The other did not seem to notice it,

looking up at him with a smile, and with what Arthur fancied a look of real affection in the large eyes.

"I'm afraid I can't, sir. I've got some work to do which will keep me until ten o'clock."

"That's all right," said Arthur, with relief; "come some other night then. I see Mr. Hunt keeps you busy," he added, making an excuse to talk while he remained. "You are a great help to him, I have no doubt. You like your work here, don't you, Dick?" his manner again indicating his inward disturbance.

"I like it better than I did at first, sir; I suppose I am getting used to it."

"Of course you are," cried Arthur.

To keep the boy by his side he invented several new wants, asking him to wait on him, and taking lengthened pains in the selection of half-a-dozen handkerchiefs and a couple of ties, until the young proprietor came back. Dropping a word of caution in the latter's ear, Arthur left the store in Richard's company, and walked with him to his boarding-house.

The happiest and the most serious responsibilities of life go hand in hand, and on his return to his study Arthur found a letter requesting his presence at a hurried wedding of two of the young people of his parish, which kept him engaged until a late hour; but, with Hunt's knowl-

edge of Garrett's presence in town, and Richard's own assurance that he was to be at the store all the evening, he felt comparatively free from anxiety. He was on his way to the store the next morning, when he stopped at the post-office and the clerk placed the letter in his hand which put everything else out of his head. No one but Rachel Armstrong herself could have made him forget Rachel Armstrong's brother; but it was with a heavy conscience that he took his hat to accompany Daniel Hunt from the house and go in search of the missing Richard.

Having promised Arthur to keep away from the boy, Garrett at once became possessed with an uncontrollable desire to see him, — a state of mind often experienced by people in a more responsible condition; but it was not until the next forenoon that the drunken man came swaggering into the store, rudely accosting the clerks and frightening the women customers, while he loudly demanded to see Dick Armstrong. The proprietor stepped promptly forward and ordered him to leave the store, upon which the other began to bluster and show a disposition to fight, suddenly subsiding from this mood, however, and concluding to go, but leaving several abusive epithets behind him and calling on Dick to follow. The boy, who had drawn near his old friend and stood watching him with a shamed and distressed coun-

tenance, hesitated, when Garrett swore at him and taunted him with being under the parson's thumb, threatening summary vengeance on the latter. Dick then prepared to follow, but his employer interfered and ordered him to remain where he was, telling him his services were needed there. Seeing that the boy, under the fascination of his old companion's presence, which even his present condition could not remove, acted as if he did not mean to obey, he tried to frighten him, and told him that if he went he need not come back. This produced no effect, and Richard had silently taken his hat and followed Garrett into the street.

Hunt was both mortified and compunctious over this treatment of his young clerk, and very indignant with Garrett, whom he wished to have arrested at once; but Arthur, fearing the effect of such a measure on Richard, prevailed on him to give up that idea for the present and let him take up the search alone. He walked boldly into the saloons, putting his questions to the proprietors of those establishments in a prompt and challenging tone that bespoke a courage exceeding his discretion. He did not find those he was seeking in any of these places, but in the last which he visited he learned that Garrett and his companion had been seen at a low groggery near the river, and that the former was trying to negotiate for a boat

in which to take passage to some point lower down the stream. The river, whose current was always dangerously rough at this point, was now swollen with the spring rains, which rendered its passage more perilous than ever. In alarm Arthur hastened in that direction, where the news he had heard was confirmed by an old man, himself half demented with constant drink, who kept a few boats to let, and from whom Garrett had readily procured what he wanted. Running hurriedly along the bank he soon caught sight of the boat, which, with its crazy captain and badly frightened crew, had providentially wedged itself in the angle of a rock whose top projected a few feet above the water. The younger of the two passengers held the oars, useless for such a passage at any time, while Garrett, in drunken security, had taken his seat at the helm, a harmless position inasmuch as he had broken the rudder. Some cause of dispute had evidently arisen between the two, and Arthur could hear Garrett's loud tones directing and cursing his companion, who seemed bent on keeping the boat in its present safe, if ignominious position, not daring to trust himself to the swift current. Arthur shouted and the boy heard, a light of new and prayerful hope breaking over his face as he saw who it was. Garrett noticed this changed look, and glancing backward toward the shore, his

jealous mistrust divined before he saw that it was Arthur who was standing there, and he leaped in a fury to his feet, overturning the boat and throwing himself and his companion into the water. In a moment the little craft had righted itself, and, slipping like an arrow round the curve of the rock, went dancing gayly on to its own destruction over the rapids below. At the same instant Arthur threw off his coat, and, leaping into the water, was breasting the waves with long strokes. The boy had managed to climb the rock, and Garrett also was clinging to its wet sides, clumsily helping himself with one of the oars which he had seized as it loosened itself from the rowlock when the boat overturned. As soon as Arthur drew near, with only his head above the water, he turned on him with vindictive rage, aiming a furious blow at him with the oar, which fell with crushing weight on the other's head and shoulder. The river and surrounding banks reeled before Arthur's vision for a moment, and then consciousness went out and he sank beneath the waves. It was Richard who plunged after him and brought him again to the surface, supporting him against the rock until help could arrive. A crowd had collected on the shore, where a boat had been quickly manned and was pushing out to their rescue.

The blow which Garrett had aimed at his vic-

tim, with such deadly effect, had exhausted his own strength and thrown him from the insecure hold he had on the rock. It had also restored his reason, though not in time for him to make any use of it, for while he fastened a horror-stricken look on Arthur's face, which was like that of the dead, a livid hue spread over his own, a cold, numbing sensation struck through his limbs, and he sank backward, and was borne down the stream.

Richard wildly implored the men to stop and search for him, but they sturdily refused and pointed to another boat which was coming out from the shore to lend its assistance. Their own was already overloaded, and the men were obliged to use all their strength to fight their way back against the current; while Arthur, who was still unconscious, and with only the faintest pulse-beat to show that he was alive, was in no condition to risk a moment's further exposure. It was, as the chief oarsman bluntly, but justly, remarked, the chance of one man's life against all the others'.

Several hours were spent in the search for Garrett's body, which was found lodged against one of the lower rocks, crushed and mangled beyond all recognition of the eyes that had cared to look on it in life; and strangers' hands covered it decently from sight and restored it to the earth it sprung from. Bill Garrett had gone to settle up his last account. The old Harry, whose influence

he feared so much, had loosened his hold on him at the last, in hopeful sign, perhaps, of another and better chance awaiting his victim somewhere else.

Arthur's injuries proved of a complicated and serious order, forbidding all thought of a return to work for several months. Word was immediately sent to his sister, Mrs. Hunt taking charge of him until her arrival. Hester remained with her brother until he was able to return with her to Dennison. This was in the latter part of June, and when they went Richard Armstrong went with them.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE NEW RECTORY.

CHASE HOWARD had been over-confident in the means selected to carry out whatever ends he had in view when he parted from Virginia with the singular threat that closed their last interview. Two or three days went by and he met her nowhere, and when he called at her friend's house he learned, to his surprise and slight chagrin, that she had returned home. These feelings passed, however, and he said to himself that any woman of spirit would have done the same. He did not, as a more impetuous lover might have done, take the next train to follow her, but waited to fulfil certain engagements pertaining to his work, until the end of another week, when he, too, set his face in the direction of the city. A month later their numerous friends and acquaintances were put in a little flutter of excitement on receiving the wedding cards of Virginia Fairfax and Chase Howard. The wedding itself was a quiet affair, and after a wedding journey of a week, the newly-married pair returned to Dennison, where the little parish of St. Andrew's met to give them suitable welcome.

A clergyman's choice of a wife is always the subject of wondering remark among the members of his congregation, and Chase Howard's selection of a helpmeet outside the limits, not only of his particular parish, but of the church membership to which he belonged, seemed an aggravation of the usual circumstances surrounding such cases and provoked much unfavorable criticism, which nothing but the popularity of the bride could have overcome. It was taken for granted, however, that Virginia, having signified sufficient approval of her husband and his vocation to marry him, could now do no less than identify herself wholly with him by uniting with the church. This seemed to be Virginia's opinion also, for on the next visit of the bishop to St. Andrew's she took her place, with one or two others, at the altar, and bowed her head to receive the consecrating touch which made her a daughter in that household of faith where her husband served as anointed apostle. The service would have pleased her better if it had been her husband's hands that thus rested in momentary blessing on her head. As it was, the real consecration came, she knew, after the public ceremony was over and she stood alone with him in their room, where she felt herself folded in his embrace, and the words "My dear wife" fell in low, thankful tones on her ear. She had taken Ruth's vow to Naomi, "Thy people

shall be my people and thy God my God," and the King's reward and blessing were already hers.

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that Virginia had changed her nature. If she had yielded in the matter of largest concern, she knew how to retain her own will and opinion in many less important matters which still bear a close relation to conjugal happiness. She had always been an ambitious woman, and that love of influence and personal leadership which marked her character as Miss Fairfax remained unchanged except that it now took the plural form of expression. She held her husband's gifts and acquirements in the highest esteem, and, though not dissatisfied with his present position, she had looked rapidly along the path of clerical advancement and decided that there was no post of honor and responsibility which he was not qualified to fill. She even forgot at times her republican principles and regretted that the English system was not our own, where the distinctions of churchly rank and privilege are more plainly marked than with us, having a pleasing vision of herself as the mistress of a large rectory with several subordinate curates to look after and advise.

"Should you like to be a bishop?" she asked her husband one day, just after the departure of the real bishop, who had prolonged his visit beyond the usual time.

He blushed to the roots of his hair.

"Why, then, I don't see why you shouldn't," in cruel recognition of this condemning sign. "I'm sure you would make a much better one than Dr. McFarren."

Howard made no reply to this. There had been a good deal in the speech and manners of their distinguished guest during his three-days' visit to the rectory, an assumption of heavy gallantry towards the young wife and a patronizing carelessness of tone towards his official subordinate, that displeased them both; but Howard would not discuss the subject with her; for if, as his wife, she deserved his full confidence, as a new convert she must be guarded against unfortunate first impressions.

Bishop McFarren had held his present position for over twenty-five years, having, while still a young man, that air of native command and skill in manipulating men which easily win the bestowal of high office. He was built on that massive physical type which seems to give corresponding moral weight and dignity to a position like his. His large frame had, by dint of good feeding and careful attention to his material wants, acquired a thick layer of fat, which gave him a mountainous appearance by the side of most men; enabling him, by sheer force of fleshly predominance, to preserve an authoritative sway over others

which, in a smaller man, would have excited opposition. To this was added a vain and arbitrary nature, which found equal gratification in the commanding influence of his position and the opportunity it afforded for self-display. Dressed in his Episcopal robes, whose ample folds lent dignity to a form that was apt to appear vulgarly obese in its secular garments, the bishop made an impression not to be forgotten. An unprejudiced listener would have pronounced his pulpit discourses as dull in matter as they were ponderous in style. Faults like these were atoned for, however, in the eyes of his admirers, by his imposing mien and bearing, together with a habit of light, graceful gesticulation with a pair of shapely hands, such as nature in an apologetic mood often bestows on people of the bishop's inordinate bulk. Wherever he went, the bishop's hands became the object of admiring regard until they were as well known as his views on the Trinity and modern Arianism, and perhaps a more effective means of grace. Dr. McFarren's theology was of a safe, mediæval type, undisturbed by modern doubts and controversies. He seldom spoke of the changing beliefs of the day, and when he did it was only to express a sense of irritation over the needless disturbance such questions imposed upon his customary modes of thinking. All religious topics were, in the bishop's opinion, unsuited to discussion, except on the com-

fortable terms existing between a spiritual adviser and those seeking his guidance. Religion, so far as he defined it at all, was a matter of pleasing form and sentiment, something that, aside from the future benefits it promises to man, serves to impart a certain patrician grace and solidity to his present existence. The Church was as valuable a means of social as of spiritual refuge, holding in rightful gift those places of comfortable emolument and distinction among which the bishop felt that he so worthily filled one.

The works of the later writers of the Church, that small band of insular divines and schoolmen who lead in the critical thought of the day, were almost unknown to him, though he disliked their teachings less than the assumption, conveyed in the ready welcome they received, that they contained something new and important to man's knowledge. The bishop was one of those who believe that, religiously speaking, the world needs nothing new. All contrary assumptions destroyed his sense of personal comfort and consequence.

The idea of a progressive Church, keeping pace with the advancing thought of the day, and making hospitable room within itself for every new discovery of truth, involved the painful consequence of a progressive clergy, with minds continually open and eager to proclaim the new

knowledge to the world, a thought repugnant to all his notions of mental ease and dignity.

Howard, on the contrary, was enamored of these new views, but especially with the idea that they might be safely embodied in the teachings of the Church. Liberalism, stripped of its ecclesiastical covering, left naked and shivering in the cold world of the rational intellect, was something he disliked and was afraid of; but this other kind, retaining those helps to imagination and faith which lie in consecrated form and symbol, leaving the mind free to adapt where it cannot wholly adopt the new teachings of science and philosophy, satisfied both heart and judgment.

He was expressing this feeling, in connection with some passing remark on a book he had just read, the last evening of his guest's stay, when he was cut short with an impatient reply. The bishop, in going on to express his own view, spoke in a tone of strong admonition, sanctioned by his office, rebuking the young rector for his choice of reading-matter and sneeringly dismissing his opinion as of no account.

A humiliated flush rose to Howard's face. He was more humiliated than angry, for the habit of respect for the bishop's position, fostered in the instruction of a lifetime, was not easily set aside and he admitted his right of reproof; but Virginia was present, and he could not avoid a stinging

sense of shame that the rebuke should have been given before her. She sat sewing by a small table in the middle of the room, and at the bishop's words her needle was held suspended a moment while she raised a large, indignant glance at him.

"You mistake me, sir," Howard said, the color still in his cheek, but preserving a deferential tone, "if you think I want to go beyond reasonable bounds. I have as little sympathy with unchurched liberalism as you could desire. I am only glad that the charge of intellectual apostasy made against the Church by some of the infidel thinkers of the day can be successfully refuted. When we have men like Stanley, Arnold, and"—

"Yes, yes," the other replied, testily; "but the Church is not dependent on the Stanleys and Arnolds. It is the Church that honors them, not they the Church."

"I am sure they would agree to that, sir."

"Oh, very likely;" was the reply, in a sneering tone. Some way the bishop felt that there was more outward respect than inward in this answer. "They are a clever set; they know how far to go and keep themselves within respectable bounds."

Howard felt the propriety of attempting no answer to such a remark, which offended his taste even more than his sense of justice. Virginia's needle moved faster. She wanted to leave the room, but was uncertain of the effect such an

action would produce, either in the mind of her husband or of her visitor. The term "infidel thinkers" had grated a little, but she was careful to make no sign.

"And as for the charge of 'intellectual apostasy,' which a scatter-brained infidelity chooses to make against us," the bishop went on, "that is nothing for you to concern yourself with. You young men are too fond of thrusting yourselves forward in that way, taking up every chance word of criticism and making it a theme of pulpit debate. It is the devil's kingdom, not Christ's, that is built on argument." Virginia wondered if the latter's was built on invective. Her hands trembled so that she had put down her work and sat with them folded tightly together, while she fastened a dark, angry gaze on the speaker.

"No clergyman who is a gentleman will employ his pulpit for such purposes. His business is to teach the doctrines of the Church and to administer the sacraments."

This was unendurable, and Virginia rose from her chair, an action that attracted the bishop's attention, and the expression of frowning reproof on his face changed to a bland and smiling one.

"We are wearying Mrs. Howard," he said, with unctuous dignity and in the indulgent tone one uses to a child. "Such topics are unsuited to discussion among ladies."

"On the contrary," said Virginia, raising her head proudly, "it is such topics that interest me most. My husband and I frequently talk of them." She was growing tired of the assumption, constantly thrust forward in their reverend guest's remarks and attentions to herself, that she belonged to a brainless order of existence. "But," she added, with a frosty smile, her heart beating with a little alarm at her own temerity, "I thought it took two to enter into a discussion as it does to make a quarrel." She checked herself as she caught her husband's eye; but the bishop was as securely shielded againt attacks of this kind by his complacent self-esteem, as his nerves were well protected against injury by the heavy layer of adipose tissue that intervened between them and the world outside. The suspicion that the rector's wife was trying to exercise her feminine sharpness upon him never crossed his mind, and would have been incredible. He admired Virginia, and, having been quite open in the expression of this feeling, had no doubt that she held a similar one towards him. He flattered himself that he had met few women who did not admire him, mingling a feeling of religious adoration of his office with a sentimental attachment for his person. It would take nothing from this sentiment of admiring veneration on Virginia's part, he thought, that he had been able to abuse and

put down her husband in her presence. Nothing served so quickly to lessen a wife's foolish belief in her husband's predominance as to witness his open defeat and discomfiture by another man, and the bishop had that inordinate vanity which cannot bear to see itself outshone in any relation. He fancied he could hear Virginia chiding and taking sides with him against her husband when he left them together, and it was, doubtless, to hasten this desirable end that he rose to go to his chamber.

Virginia was still standing in the middle of the room when he drew near to say farewell. He was to leave on an early train in the morning, and would not see her again.

"So your husband discusses theology with you," he said, in a tone of disagreeable raillery. "Could he find no better way of wooing you than that?" bestowing an insinuating look on her through half-closed eyelids. "I could have taught him one." He extended his hand and held hers in a soft clasp. Virginia had come to shrink from the touch of those white hands. "Mind you make him do what I wish and open a parochial school; I expect to pay a visit to it the next time I come. I leave the matter in your hands," with a final pressure of his own as she drew hers away.

Virginia made only a vague reply, coldly expressed; but a little conscious shame mantled her

cheek as she recalled how she had thoughtlessly given encouragement to the command thus laid on her and the sympathetic partnership it seemed to imply. The idea of a parochial school, a subject on which the bishop and her husband had taken different sides, had rather pleased Virginia's fancy at first. As the rector's wife she would naturally play the part of chief patroness of such an institution, and it was in an agreeable light that she saw herself paying regular visits to the school, advising the teachers and distributing prizes among the most industrious pupils. Aided by this imaginary vision she had unconsciously lent a sympathetic ear to the bishop's talk on the subject and did not appreciate at first the force of her husband's objections. Howard had inwardly condemned it as an absurd scheme from the beginning. Dennison, small, old-fashioned village as it was, already had its public school, equipped with competent teachers and all needful appliances for its work. St. Andrew's was a small, struggling parish, which with difficulty maintained its single weekly service, and Howard could well foresee the consequence of trying to impose another burden on the society, such as was involved in an unnecessary enterprise of this kind. But the scheme of a parochial school had failed to impress him with its own merits. He was an obedient disciple of the Church, who desired to witness its prosperity

and growth in power, but he did not believe these ends could be gained by applying ecclesiastical methods to affairs of temporal concern. The Church had enough to do to attend to its work of religious instruction; other kinds had better be left to the State. Howard was not one of those who in his attachment to the first seemed to set it over in opposition to every other form of instituted government. He was a patriotic citizen as well as Churchman, and, following the bent of the public-spirited interest he took in the affairs about him, he had accepted a position on the village school board. The bishop had expressed strong disapproval of this action, chiding his subordinate for the too active interest he took in secular affairs. He did not, however, scruple to ask him to make use of the influence he had thus gained to obtain an appropriation from the village treasury to found the parochial school, — a request which excited a sickening displeasure in the young clergyman. He was glad, in his search for an example in his public conduct and duty, to set aside that offered by his present religious superior in favor of one presented by another image, that cherished in the remembrance of the bishop who presided over the diocese in which his father labored. The recollection of Dr. Edwards, with his broad spirit, ripe scholarship, and active labors for the public good, was among Howard's inspirations. Be-

tween him and his father had been the bond of a strong brotherly sympathy and affection; and the son still recalled the scenes in his father's study where, lounging in some idly reflective mood of boyhood, he caught in dreamy echo the scraps of the learned talk which fell from the lips of the older men, as they sat conversing together and exchanging counsel. It was no discredit to Howard that he would have liked to be such a bishop as that.

Turning from Virginia the bishop bade a careless good-night to his host, who was to see him off in the morning. The two stood listening in silence as he climbed the stairs with his heavy step and closed the door of his chamber. Then Virginia turned and flung herself on her husband's breast.

"I hate him!" she exclaimed below her breath, and clinging to him with caressing kindness, as if to atone for the slight he had received.

"Hush! hush!" he said, trying to quiet her, but putting his arm about her and drawing her close to him. She only repeated with the same energy the words she had used before.

"He need not think I will help him about his parochial school, — a ridiculous idea!"

"Oh, well, we need not be troubled about that. The vestry would never consent to it; they couldn't raise the money," — with a lugubrious smile.

Virginia thought that she knew where the money could come from; but the vision of the white-washed room, with rows of docile, clean-faced children waiting for her to come and distribute prizes among them, had lost its charm, and she told herself rather sharply that she had been a simpleton.

"I can't help it, Chase," she said in a decided tone; "I shall always go away when it is time for him to come after this."

He knew that he ought to reprove such a sentiment as this, but his resolution failed him, and he contented himself with reminding her that he would not come again for a year.

"Well, that is a good thing," she said with relief. "I don't think our people could stand many such sermons as that of last Sunday."

Here he grew a little alarmed and tried to stop her, casting an apprehensive glance towards the ceiling.

"Chase, you know yourself that there wasn't an idea in it."

"Oh, you have such a passion for ideas!"—then assuming a more clerical tone, something such as might have been employed by the individual upstairs: "People should not go to church for the sermon."

"Why, then, do you not preach a few poor ones?" A warm flush rose to his cheek. This

kind of praise was very sweet after what he had just gone through.

Virginia wanted to remain and pour out the full flood of her indignant feeling; but this he would not permit, persuading her to go to her room and leave him to finish some writing. She kissed him obediently and went towards the door, then turned with one of her swift movements and came back to him, looking newly discomposed about something.

"Whom did you mean by 'infidel thinkers'?" she asked. He looked both a little amused and repentant.

"There is always bad taste in a remark of that kind," meeting her eyes frankly; "and where there is bad taste, there must be bad morals too. Will that do?" smiling at her.

She smiled brightly in return, kissed him again, and left the room with a perfectly satisfied countenance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT THE NEW RECTORY. — CONTINUED.

VIRGINIA'S notions as to what her husband might become in the future were directly related as to how they should live in the present. Having determined to marry, Chase Howard, with masculine independence, such as belongs to the future head of a household, had gone on and made his own plans for providing a home for his bride, renting the whole of the little cottage whose principal rooms he already occupied as boarder, and retaining his landlady, a widowed parishioner, as house-keeper. He had said nothing to Virginia of these arrangements, the point at which a young man dependent on a monthly salary can approach the subject of their future house-keeping with the owner of a three-story Mansard in the city, and a corresponding amount of bank-stock to equip and run it, being difficult to determine. Virginia had rewarded him with a silence equal to his own, until they got back to Dennison. Then she openly ridiculed the little cottage, and declared they must have another house at once, setting out one morning by herself on a tour of investigation. Learning that

a neighbor of Hester's, and the owner of a large residence was about to abandon it on account of the recent death of his wife, she began negotiations in that quarter, doing everything in her husband's name, who, she took pains to explain, was too busy to attend to such matters himself,—a harmless statement, as it deceived nobody. Returning to the study, where he sat writing at his desk, she spread the lease before him and requested him to sign it. He looked up at her in well-affected surprise. "My dear, we can't afford it."

She seated herself on his knee and regarded him with a forbearing smile. "I hope you aren't going to be silly, Chase."

He replied that he hoped not either. "It is useless to pretend not to understand you, my dear; but you must remember that you have married a poor man"—

She sprung from his knee, and, wheeling herself about, threw out her arms with an expressive gesture.

"Do I look like a woman who can live on a hundred and fifty dollars a month?" she asked.

He cast an uneasy glance at her as she stood there, attired in a rich suit of velvet with handsome ornaments of jet, which jingled musically at every motion she made. Something in his look smote her conscience, and she dropped on the floor at his side, throwing her arms about him.

"It's not true," she cried. "I could live on fifty or five even," her imagination taking a heroic leap into the dark. "I could live on nothing at all — any way and anywhere with you," — raising her face to receive the kiss he bent down to give. "I could, but" — drawing herself back to look at him, "I don't want to. What is the use?" she added, as he laughed and turned away. "Why should we not use the money if we have it? We could be just as happy without it, of course, though I am sure we shall be a great deal happier with it." There was nothing to be said to such reasoning as this, and they moved into the larger house. Virginia transferred the furniture and pictures, the Persian rugs and *bisque* ornaments, that belonged to her city establishment to her home in Dennison, setting the example of a new order of house-keeping such as that quiet village had never before witnessed, and becoming herself the centre of an admiring and increasing circle of friends, the cheery and graceful mistress of the most hospitable house in town.

The parish of St. Andrew's, which had hitherto held a rather obscure position among the larger sects of the village, suddenly found itself borne along on a new tide of social prosperity. The attendance at the Sunday services began to increase, and soon several new families had taken pews. The influence of the minister's wife, not

directly exerted, but flowing unconsciously from her general character and habits, was so easily discerned in this change that the minister himself felt a little piqued and less grateful for it than was supposed, carrying about with him the shamed consciousness of one who has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. He could not regret his marriage to Virginia, who grew dearer to him every day; but the thought would sting his conscience at times that life was becoming dangerously easy nowadays; and he looked back with a little pang of envy to the hours he had spent with that lonely, rather seedy, student he used to know, just gaining a foothold in the work he loved, and whose high-hearted faith and courage compensated for all the privations of his lot. So far as he could, however, he ignored all the outward changes in his surroundings and endeavored to throw himself into his work with the same single-minded energy as before. As he had begun life a clergyman, honestly believing in his work and his own power of usefulness in it, so he meant to carry it through to the end. He was Virginia's husband, but he would not be the idle sharer of benefits he had no hand in creating, nor her man of business. This last determination was conveyed to her one day when she came to him with a package of formidable-looking documents in her hand, the accumulation of several months' bills and other

business matters, which she had neglected to attend to in the early period of her house-keeping. She did not understand her own motive in going to him for such a purpose, having yielded to some unreasoning instinct which she could neither explain nor defend.

Her husband looked down at the papers with a little frown when she had, with some embarrassment, stated her errand.

"I thought you employed an agent to attend to these things," he said.

"No, indeed," she quickly replied; "they cheat you so; I have always attended to them myself."

"Then why not do so still?" with the least suspicion of marital coldness. Few husbands are able to forego all betrayal of displeasure at the signs of manifest advantage in a wife. "You have time enough. It was only the other day you were wishing for something to do."

"Of course, I have time enough," she replied hesitatingly; "but I thought — I didn't know but you — I suppose it would be a great bother to you. Well, if you say so then," and, with the papers still in her hand, she left him. She owned as she did so a definite, though half-shamed sense of relief, for, though she had gone to him in wifely affection, and with a loyal desire to make him chief in everything, it gratified her pride both

in herself and in him that he had shown no haste to assume the rights she proffered.

Things went on in this way until the baby came. When Hamlet told Horatio that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in his philosophy, it is supposed that, being a bachelor and about to drive the only young woman of his acquaintance to a nunnery, he could not have meant babies, — but he might.

According to Virginia's well-known principles her baby was a girl, who had received the name of her paternal grandmother, Henrietta. Henrietta came into the world the first of the month, the same time the rents were due. She was lying in the cradle a few days after her birth, very red and wrinkled still, while the mother lay in a light slumber in the bed close by, when Howard entered the room. Virginia opened her eyes and smiled a welcome, and as he came near whispered to him not to wake the baby.

He cast a look of pretended alarm towards the cradle. "You don't suppose I want to wake her after last night." The new-comer had kept him and the whole household awake several hours the night before with a prolonged fit of crying, and his first feelings of fatherly enthusiasm had received a chill.

"Now, Chase," — in an aggrieved tone, — "don't tell me that you are tired of the baby already;"

but he assured her very soberly that he had never meant to tell her or any one, and that a thing of that kind should be kept strictly locked in one's own breast. Putting a check to this humorous mood he seated himself by her, taking her hand and praising her improved looks, rewarding the latter with a kiss. Then he took a package of letters from his pocket, the nature of which Virginia recognized at once.

"Well, I must say, Chase," she exclaimed in weak protest, "that you might attend to those horrid bills yourself! You can't expect me to sign a lot of receipts now."

"My dear child, what are you talking about? Of course I shall attend to them; but here is something you ought to hear," opening one of the letters. She declared that she wished to hear nothing. "I don't want to listen to a word. You know the doctor said I was not to be worried," in an injured tone; "and if the Grants are behindhand with their rent again I don't want to know it."

"The Grants are all right," he said, soothingly; "but what am I to do about this?" glancing at the written sheet in his hand. "Your annual fee is due to the Equal Rights Society; I'm afraid you don't attend to your duties very well."

"Dear me! I thought I paid that long ago," Virginia said, in some concern. "You must send

the money right away, Chase. I don't see how I came to forget it."

"Hadn't you better double it?" he asked; "in honor of Henrietta, you know," with a faint, inscrutable smile, that the dim light of the room concealed from her. "She'll want the ballot, too, when she hears of it, I suppose; she seems to want everything else."

"O Chase! how good in you! Of course I know you don't care a thing about it, but that makes it all the more generous in you; it's really noble. I shall tell Hester;" and with this thought in mind she turned her face on the pillow and fell weakly off to sleep.

He sat watching her a while, then rose to pass softly from the room, stopping a moment by the cradle and gently raising the quilt to get a better look at the small, puckered visage beneath. The little wrist above the small clenched hand on the pillow was not so large as the finger of the one that softly touched it, and a strange feeling of mingled happiness and wonder stirred the young father's heart, as he stood looking down on the tiny being that had sprung from his own, then, carefully replacing the quilt, he left the room with a noiseless step.

The period of Virginia's convalescence was rather long, and her husband was obliged to assume these business duties many times, so that when she

was quite well again he seemed to have fallen into the habit of attending to certain matters which his wife, urging the baby as an excuse, declared she never meant to touch again. She did not go so far as that, however, and thereafter they divided between them the care of those material interests which had fallen to their keeping, until, through use, and the growing intimacy of the married years which followed, they both forgot whose had been the larger share in the beginning.

The same principle of the division of labor was applied in the care of Henrietta. Virginia had adopted some original ideas concerning the use and meaning of the paternal office, being determined that the father of her child should never, through his own indifference or her selfish usurpation, forget the nature of this relation. In pursuance of this principle Howard found himself called on at frequent and unexpected seasons to take charge of his offspring; and was not surprised when, after seating himself at his desk one morning, the door opened and Virginia, dressed for a walk, appeared on the threshold, dragging the cradle, with its sleeping occupant, into the room. She explained to him that she had just received a note from Hester Forbes, who had returned from the West with her brother, and who had sent for her; that the nurse-maid had gone on an errand, and that the cook was busy with the

Saturday baking, so there was nothing to do but to bring the baby in there. Virginia was a little afraid of the cook, who was a valuable servant, and whom she hesitated to offend by asking her to perform any labors outside of her own department, — but she was not afraid of her husband. She seemed to recognize, however, that she had chosen an inopportune time to put her theories in practice, and hastened to soothe the latter's feelings with the assurance that Henrietta always slept until noon, and that there wasn't the least danger of his being disturbed. Then she gave the cradle two or three gentle swings and, pausing by the desk to drop a self-exculpating kiss on her husband's cheek, tiptoed out of the room. In a little over an hour she returned, rushing eagerly into the study to relieve herself of some exciting news.

"O Chase! I want to tell you something. I just met Mrs. Graham and — why, did she wake up?" as she caught sight of Henrietta awake, and sitting on her father's knee, while the latter, having pushed his writing materials out of her reach, sat leaning back in his chair regarding her with a rueful expression.

"She did," he replied, in a resigned tone, "about five minutes after you left." Here the object of these remarks threw herself backward with a spring, and, opening her mouth, gave utterance to a long, gurgling cry of delight.

"Oh, what a naughty, naughty baby!" said her mother severely, as she approached and took her in her arms, "to wake up and disturb papa at his writing. Dear me! what's that on her face?" catching sight of a red and green stain at the corners of the little one's mouth.

"She's been chewing the books," her father explained, with the same patient air. "I couldn't keep her quiet any other way. She seemed to like the green ones best."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Virginia; "I hope she hasn't poisoned herself with arsenic."

"Why, yes, I hope so too," Howard replied, with a slight accession of interest, as if, now that his attention had been called to such a possibility, he felt bound to express a decent concern. He looked calmly on while Virginia, dropping into a seat, laid the helpless infant on its back and held it there, while she began vigorously rubbing its face and the inside of its mouth with her handkerchief, Henrietta resisting with all her strength and filling the air with her stifled shrieks.

Virginia came out of this encounter flushed and triumphant, restoring the abused infant to an upright position when she had finished, and giving her her bracelet to play with.

"I was going to tell you, Chase," she began again, — "am I interrupting you?" looking up at him with well-simulated anxiety.

"Go on," he replied.

"Well, I won't stay more than a minute. I met Mrs. Graham, and she has decided to be confirmed."

The minister, who was supposed to feel a special interest in news of this kind, assumed a perfectly expressionless countenance, taking up a pencil and sharpening it with his knife. His wife looked at him curiously.

"Of course you don't like it," she said, with a slight mocking touch. "You care a great deal more that the dress-maker, Mary Sinclair, is going to be confirmed."

"Mary Sinclair is a good girl," he said.

"Oh, 'good'! what has that got to do with it?"

"Something, I hope."

"Of course; but you provoke me so, Chase. I know now," she continued, with an aggrieved air, "why it is so hard for a rich man to go through the eye of a needle: it is because he has no encouragement."

Her husband laughed outright.

"It was the camel that went through the eye of the needle, my dear."

"You know what I mean. Because Mrs. Graham has money and is popular you must be so indifferent about her joining the church. If there are any people I feel sorry for it is for those

who have money, who wear good clothes, and have enough to eat, and yet try to do their duty, with no one to give them the least help or praise for it."

He smiled a little. "'A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind,'" he murmured.

"Of course it does," she retorted, rising with the baby in her arms and holding it against her shoulder, its long embroidered skirts reaching nearly to the floor. She went over and stood before him. "You would have liked me a great deal better if I had been poor, and had worn a brown alpaca like Mary Sinclair's?"

He shook his head doubtfully. "Poverty is becoming only to a few," he replied. "I doubt if you could have lived up to it."

"I dare say not," was the reply; "but you'll have to put up with me now."

"Not much longer just at present, I hope," with a look at the unwritten pages of his sermon on the desk.

"Yes, I'm going right away," in response to this hint. "I only want to tell you about Arthur Forbes. He was badly hurt, and Hester is very anxious about him. He tried to rescue some one who was drowning or something, I don't remember the particulars. Any way, it was very heroic, and the other one, the boy he rescued, is Mr. Armstrong's runaway son. He has come home

with them. I wonder how Rachel Armstrong will feel now."

"She will probably be glad her brother was not drowned."

"But, Chase, you don't understand; she and Arthur Forbes were lovers."

A look of recollection broke over his face.

"Oh, yes, I remember. I don't believe she will marry him for gratitude; she is too sensible for that. I've always admired Miss Armstrong. She reminds me of St. Cecilia."

Virginia looked at him thoughtfully.

"I never can remember whether St. Cecilia sang to the angels or the angels sang to her,"—her memory for sacred legends seeming rather faulty. Her husband explained that it was the angels who made up the audience.

"I think that would have suited Miss Armstrong."

The latter young woman was almost the only one among Virginia's new acquaintances whom she had failed to get along with, Rachel meeting all her advances with a chilling unresponsiveness that she herself could not explain and felt a little ashamed of.

Virginia gathered up her things, and, with the baby in her arms, left the room. She came back twice, once to give her husband a message from Mrs. Graham, and the second time to find the baby's rattle.

"This is positively the last time," she said, lifting a face of laughing penitence to his.

"I know it," he replied, and accompanied her to the door, where he kissed and pushed her through, and she heard him turn the key in the lock.

He walked a few times up and down the room, running his fingers through his hair and brushing his hand across his face, to restore his usual faculties and rid himself of the bewildering image of the one who had just left him. Any number of experiences similar to this he had just passed through occurred every week to renew the assurance that he was married to Virginia. Looking round on the circle of his masculine acquaintances, it seemed to him that he was the most completely married of them all, not only in respect to the constant content and sense of refreshment which this relation brought, but in the consciousness that whatever he undertook or accomplished now seemed done in the double capacity of himself and Virginia's husband. The impress of her loving, lively presence was stamped on everything. The staid, orderly habits of his bachelorhood had changed into a life in which each day contained some fresh surprise, and over which hung a continually impending sense of the unexpected. A more consistent woman than Virginia would have wearied, where she only bewildered and distracted him.

Her bright presence and unreasoning ways stimulated his fancy as much now, at the end of a year's marriage, as when he first knew her; and in addition to being his loved and honored wife, she still remained the most entertaining woman of his acquaintance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOME AGAIN.

THOUGH Rachel Armstrong was not convinced by the sermon she had read, which she did not wholly understand, she was sensibly affected by it. There was a power of earnest thought in it and an eloquence born of true feeling which compelled her acknowledgment, although directed to such unhappy ends. Then, as Mrs. Meredith had said, the writer had a good style, and, as a piece of literary composition, the little blue-covered pamphlet aroused in Rachel something the same feeling of joint ownership and pride with which she had regarded the old efforts of Arthur's school-days. Along with these feelings ran another that was deeper. Strange and inexplicable as were the principles set forth in the little pamphlet, they were not so startling as she had supposed they would be. Something in the general tone of the writer — the pressing thought of his personality perhaps — created a certain likeness between the sentiments here expressed and others she seemed to have made half-recognized acquaintance with before.

This feeling aroused a keen remembrance of

some letters she had resolutely put out of sight two years ago, consigning them to a hidden drawer in an unused closet, from which no pretence of necessity or accident, nothing but a deliberate act on her part, could rescue them. For days she went about fighting the sudden, strong wish that had risen within her to get out the letters and re-read them. She caught herself going to the closet, where she had secreted them, on several pretended errands, and when she returned without them it was with the same weak, boastful sense of strength that Bill Garrett had when he mustered the resolution to pass by a saloon without entering. Such a comparison would have given much offence to the deacon's daughter; but the reflection which we catch of ourselves in the mixed stream of the common humanity to which we belong is agreeable to none of us, being quite unlike the fair image that smiles back at us from the serene eyes of one who loves us and estimates us at our best.

Rachel Armstrong was in the habit of measuring her behavior by the actions of those above her, the secret, in some measure, of those periods of melancholy discouragement from which she suffered. Since she had displeased her father by her refusal to marry Robert Knowles, she had led a lonely life at home; for, though she read assurance of her sister's sympathy in every look and word,

she would not commit the weakness of seeming to recognize or seek it, and they lived more apart than before. She felt herself misunderstood and neglected, and though she was in that state where she kept telling herself that she deserved nothing, that did not prevent her from feeling a dumb resentment when she received it. We never desire the love of others so much as when we have ceased to love ourselves. Never had she so longed for a single word of friendly approval from a source she could respect. That last condition was important; it was only the praise of the best that could satisfy Rachel Armstrong. In former days she had received this from her lover. Though she had always oppressed him a little with her exactions, holding him to the most difficult standards, as she did every one she cared for, and making him, as Arthur had said, a little afraid of her, she had rewarded this fear with a similar feeling on her part towards him, guarding with jealous care that ideal of herself which she knew existed in his mind. As she had sought refuge from another man's love in the remembrance of his she had rejected, so the thought of him remained her chief, though unacknowledged, support in every other trial.

When she yielded at last and brought out the letters, reading them carefully through again, she saw with a little alarm what it was in the printed

sermon that had disturbed her. The identity of its author with the writer of the letters was so clear that she grew confused and began to doubt the source of both. Much that the young minister had said plainly and with a definite purpose in the sermon he had expressed in more general terms, or strongly implied, in his letters. It could have been nothing but her sleeping fears and a feeling of ignorant security that had prevented her from seeing this at first. It was evident that her lover, unable to summon resolution to speak plainly, had endeavored to prepare her for what was to come by gentle, unconscious degrees. This belief, which she courted and made the most of, softened her a little; for it was Arthur's long silence, followed by the sudden shock of revelation, which she had found hardest to forgive. Now she said to herself that if he had been weak he had not meant to be untrue. Evidence of the mental conflict he had undergone was manifest in almost every line of the letters, now that her vision was clear to see it, and in her usual fashion she began to blame herself, though not to exculpate him. Had she seen them earlier she could have done something to check these rising doubts and questions, nipping the poisonous blossom of religious heresy in the bud.

There was another reason why the reading of these letters troubled her. How should she explain to her own conscience that she had not

sooner recognized here the sentiments she had been quick to condemn later? Was it because she, too, had been in danger of drifting away from the old beliefs? She asked herself this question with an indifference that surprised herself; not because she stood ready to reject or to think more lightly of those beliefs than before, but because no punishment she might receive in consequence could be more severe than that she had already suffered. Or, she asked herself, was there so little difference between the old views of her lover and those he now taught? It was this question which troubled and confused her most; and wherever she turned for an answer this confusion increased. Help seemed wanting in all the old quarters. Mr. Barnes had given a series of discourses lately in which he tried to prove that the religious instinct was part of man's natural inheritance, qualified by the external circumstances of climate and racial tendency. What, then, became of the ideas of special grace and revelation? Mr. Barnes had not attempted to answer that question; but it was one that a mind like Rachel Armstrong's could not put by. Her father had condemned the sermons as being atheistic and opposed to Scripture; but her sister had listened to them with rapt attention. She turned to her Bible; but even that she thought, with a little shudder at her own impiety, seemed to play her false. Or was it that a proud

and wilful spirit had kept her from seeing the meaning of those lessons of mercy and charity with which its pages now seemed filled? She closed the little Testament and would read no more, saying that she was not in the proper frame of mind, and until she could cease interpolating her own weak thoughts and wishes into the sacred texts, she did not deserve the help they could give her. She was in this state of resolute weakness and friendless isolation when the news of Arthur Forbes's accident reached her.

Arthur did not bear the journey well. The jolting motion of the cars aggravated the hurts he had received and renewed the fever, so that he was confined to his room several days after reaching Dennison. Exaggerated reports of his condition were circulated in the village and reached Rachel's ears, filling her with dumb despair. No one seemed to notice her nor spoke to her of Arthur. If anything were to happen — if he were to be taken worse, she would be the last one to know of it. Old friends and acquaintances who knew of her former relation to Arthur looked at her curiously when they met her. Her sister, who had been one of the first to visit him and went there nearly every day, avoided her. Her father, too, who had called to express his regrets at the illness of his son's benefactor and to repeat his sense of obligation, preserved an intentional silence in her

presence. Arthur's old pastor also had paid him several visits, taking his little son with him, who was now lying very ill with an attack of diphtheria. To Rachel Armstrong it seemed as if the action of all these was directly aimed, in warning and reproach, against herself. All the world was in league against her to set her an example which it well knew she could not follow. She tried to make friends with her brother; but he, too, seemed to avoid her society, hanging continually about his older sister when at home, but spending most of his time at Arthur's bedside, where his services were a needed help to Hester Forbes.

The returned prodigal had not received a very warm welcome from his father, perhaps because there had been so few signs of repentance on his part. Richard was obliged to dispense with the favors received by his Scripture prototype, to whom he did rather scant justice, — the golden chain and fatted calf, — but he did not seem to miss them. The deacon would have found it difficult under any circumstances to act the part of the loving and generous-hearted father, more anxious to believe in than to punish the offending one; and the New Testament story had never been one of his favorite reading. His self-love could never remit an injury, into which he construed every act of opposition on the part of

those around him, and a cold distrust marked his manner at this time towards both of his younger children.

One day Rachel, going into the sitting-room on some trifling errand, found her brother asleep in the large rocker by the window. She looked at him a moment in unwilling admiration as he sat leaning back in his chair, his dark curls resting against the cushioned top, and his long, black eyelashes sweeping over the smooth cheeks. She had tried to compel a feeling of sisterly love and confidence in this brother, but had not succeeded very well. This had not prevented another feeling of wounded pride and disappointment that he seemed to care so little for her. She was in a keenly sensitive mood nowadays, when a careless word or look, even from those she was indifferent to, cut her to the quick. She envied Rebecca's gift for making people love her, but she did not wish to be like Rebecca in order to win such love. What she really wanted, even more than love, was that people should understand and do her justice; — this brother with the rest, who, because she tried to obey her conscience and would not gloss over his misdeeds with false charity, must condemn her as unsisterly. While she stood looking at him, with these feelings of mixed distrust and longing struggling in her breast, he slowly opened his eyes and saw her, rising at once to his feet

and taking his hat from the table near by to leave the room.

"Don't go," she said, in a voice which contained both rebuke and entreaty. "I am sorry I waked you — I didn't know you were here. Why do you go?" as he moved slowly towards the door.

He paused and seemed embarrassed, murmuring something about Mr. Forbes wanting him. A conscious look swept over her face, but when she spoke it was in a tone she tried to make as light and easy as possible.

"You think a great deal of Mr. Forbes? I hope you don't like staying with him better than at your own home." In spite of herself a faint note of rebuke would creep in the last words.

"I guess there's some reason for it, if I do," he replied, in half-surly fashion.

"Reason!" she exclaimed. "Do you mean that we are not glad to have you home again — that we do not treat you as well as he does?"

"I don't know as I mean that," he said in the same tone.

She had caught the accusing sound of her own voice and tried to correct it. "Oh, you mean that he has done so much for you that you want to do something for him? That is right, of course. Come,"— in a persuasive tone, —"sit down and tell me about it. You have never told me about the

accident, and that dreadful drunken wretch who struck Arthur — Mr. Forbes, I mean."

"Dreadful drunken wretch!" repeated the boy, angrily. "Nobody shall call Bill Garrett that to me. Mr. Forbes doesn't talk like that. I'm going to him now," turning on his heel.

"No — no," cried his sister, springing forward and placing herself in his way. "I didn't mean to hurt you — I forgot he was your friend. Do forgive me!" throwing her arms about him, the quick tears rising to her eyes. "Don't be cross with me. Why do you dislike me so much? You have no right to dislike me; I am your sister too."

Her brother was completely surprised at this demonstration, looking at her with a wondering and abashed countenance, as she stood there clinging to him with tearful eyes raised to his. For herself, it was natural that this impulse at an end she should feel a little ashamed of it. She drew a step away from him and a veil of fine, frosty mist seemed suddenly to envelop her.

"You had better go now; it would be a pity to keep Mr. Forbes waiting." The boy hesitated, and seemed not in such haste as he had been. "Though I don't see why Mr. Forbes needs you so much, if he is better," she added in swift renewal of her former manner.

Her brother looked at her with a new expres-

sion, recalling, all at once, the story Arthur had told him of his engagement to this sister. He had paid little attention to it at the time, hardly thinking of it since, and now it made its first forcible impression on him, arousing his boyish curiosity and love of mischief. Seeing him hesitate and look at her strangely, her imagination took instant alarm. "He is better, isn't he?" in a quick, frightened tone.

"The doctor says he's better," he made answer, after a moment's pause, and with seeming careful reserve. "I suppose he knows."

"But you, Richard, you think so too? You have been with him more than the doctor. O Richard!" clasping her hands and raising an anxious face to his.

"Well, then, I don't think he's better," was the slow reply. "I shouldn't wonder if he was going to have a relapse," resting his large, innocent eyes on her. "It's my belief he's got something on his mind."

"Something on his mind?" darting a suspicious look at him. "What can you know about that?"

"He mopes too much," her brother went on without heeding her changed manner, "and don't seem to take no interest in things. Talks queer in his sleep sometimes, too, and" —

A bright red surged over her face, and she turned abruptly away.

"Nonsense!" she said sharply. "You don't know what you are talking about. The doctor must understand his patient's condition much better than you do. You had better go now."

Though she half suspected her brother's purpose, the main import of what he had told her remained to disturb and rebuke her. Arthur was ill, suffering not only from the effects of the physical injuries he had received, but from her unkindness. What if it were all true, and he were never to get well again? It was she who would be the guilty cause. It was she who was to blame for everything that had happened. What should she do? — what should she do? She walked up and down the room, clasping and unclasping her hands, and pressing them against her heart to still its wild beating. The sound of voices in the next room, her father and sister talking together in subdued tones, caught her ear. She stepped stealthily to the door and listened. The first words struck her with a death-like chill. It was his name her father spoke, — Arthur's, — and he seemed to ask a question, which her sister answered in words that froze her blood.

"He is much worse. The doctor says he cannot live."

She caught at a chair near by, supporting herself against it, and exerting all her will to recover her failing strength. She had now but one thought —

to see Arthur. So soon as she could breathe freely and the room had ceased to swim before her sick vision, she started. There was a path leading from the garden at the back of the house, through one or two neighboring yards to Arthur's, and, seizing her hat as she passed through the hall, she went out this way. In the garden she met her brother.

"O, Richard! have you seen him? I know everything — he is worse — dying! Don't stop me; I'm going to him."

She started at a quick, breathless pace down the path. He looked after her in dumb astonishment, then opened his lips to call her back, but checked himself.

"I didn't think it was in her," he said, as he turned away, determining to hide himself where he could see her when she returned.

It was not until she reached her lover's house that a single doubt arose within her. She paused inside the hall, hesitating a moment which direction to take next. Some safe instinct led her up the broad flight of stairs, round a projecting corner, to Arthur's room. The door was open, and with a noiseless step she drew near and looked in. The room had but a single occupant, and he was standing near a table in the middle, looking pale and thin, with his right arm bound to his side, while he was awkwardly trying to mix something

in a tumbler with his left hand. It was the first time he had attempted to walk without assistance.

The glad cry that leaped to her lips when she saw him was quickly repressed by a feeling of consternation and shame. Her only wish now was to get away from the house as quietly as she had come in. If he were to turn and see her there she should die of humiliation. Thinking she heard the sound of footsteps in the hall below she started guiltily. At the same moment Arthur, turning towards the door, saw her.

"Rachel!" he cried, springing towards her, but stopping at once, compelled by the dizzy rush of the blood to his brain, and throwing out his well arm in a blind, imploring motion towards her. She rushed forward to support him in his weakness, a delicious excuse for feeling herself folded close against his heart, his passionate kisses raining down on her hair and eyes and brow. They led each other back to his chair. He sank weakly into into it, and she knelt in a tumult of happiness and gratitude and shame on the floor at his side.

"They said you were worse; that you were going to die," she said, brokenly, raising her tear-drowned face to his, and then hiding it on his breast. He strained her to his heart. "It would be easy to die now."

"You shall never die!" she said, raising her face again and looking earnestly at him. "You shall

live — and I, I will help you. Oh!" she cried with another rush of tears, "I have been hard and cruel — I have been selfish," — he kissed her again and again in denial of these words, — "but I give it all up. No, I don't mean that — only I am so tired." She clung closer to him. "And I have been so unhappy — They treated me so. Nobody cared or tried to help. There was nobody who could help but you," hiding her face again in abandoned grief and passion on his breast.

Arthur could not speak, and gave himself up to a mute ecstasy of feeling that was more like pain, except that he would have had it last forever.

This first excess of emotion past, she grew more composed, and the two sat face to face, their hands clasped and their eyes resting on each other in glad, continually-renewed recognition of their recovered happiness. She was all gentleness and loving contrition, a tender humility mingling with the fond anxiety expressed in every look and tone. Arthur had never seen her like this before. Such moments pass quickly. It was not like Rachel Armstrong to rest long even in the joy of such a reunion as this. Her heart was too full, her conscience still too much disturbed, the future all too uncertain.

"I am so tired," she said again, leaning towards him. "I can't understand things. I have tried to — but, oh, I am afraid I never can; and

then — if I should not make you happy — if I should only be a hindrance, and not a help to you."

"Not make me happy," he cried; "make me unhappy then," with a boyish laugh. "I would rather be made unhappy by you than to be happy in any other way."

She looked at him mournfully. "But you do not understand; I must tell you. I want you should know everything," with passionate eagerness. "I have read the sermon."

"The sermon," he repeated, in a puzzled tone.

"Yours, I mean," and mentioned the title.

"Oh, that," he replied, in light disparagement.

"Yes, but you must listen. I couldn't understand it, — 'the continuous unfolding of the divine energy'" — quoting his printed words. "I don't know what that means, and — I shall have to tell you, I don't want to know," drawing herself back and looking piteously at him, as if there could now be no question but that he must send her away. "I want something different from that — something nearer," her voice sinking, "one that I can see sometime, and — and pray to."

Beatrice never received a look of more worshipful tenderness than he gave her. He raised her hand to his lips. "Pray for me," he said, softly.

She threw herself sobbing on his breast, and he let her lie there a moment.

"Do you think there can be any question between us," he asked, as she grew quiet again, "as to which is greatest and best, the God of your feeling, or the God of my definition? It is your feeling that shall correct my definition. See now how much I need you."

She gave him a grateful look, and the need for further talk on these subjects passed for the present, their conversation slipping back into easier channels. She had grown more cheerful, and was talking in a happy, self-forgetful strain, while he was putting eyes and heart and ears into the act of listening, when a noise at the door aroused them. Rachel sprung to her feet in guilty confusion, but Arthur held her hand firmly in his, while his sister, with a look of bewildered surprise on her face, came forward.

"It is all right," he said, looking up at her. "We shall never be parted again."

Hester looked at Rachel, and read the confirmation of this news in her blushing, downcast face. She held out her hand. "I am very glad," she said, in her clear tones. "This was the medicine Arthur needed," glancing at her brother, who seemed to be rapidly growing well again. "The others were beginning to fail."

Rachel cast a penitent look towards her. "I have been to blame," she said.

"She does not think so," Arthur exclaimed.

"She has always stood up for you." His sister smiled, and though Rachel did not understand, she caught sight of something in the older woman's face, the imprint of a large and wise understanding, sincere feeling and goodness, that commanded her instant homage. She put out her hand as if entreating the other's pardon for something.

"I ought to have known you better," she said. "It was my fault that I did not."

"No, it was not your fault — it was nobody's fault; we cannot force our feelings in such matters. I have not always done you justice either, but we shall both do better now."

She put her arm about the other, bending down to kiss her in seal of the new bond between them, while Arthur looked on with shining eyes.

When Rachel returned she met Richard in the garden, the latter coming carelessly out from the shadow of the grape-vine. They looked at each other in mute challenge a moment, but there was no room in her heart for petty resentments, and she ran towards him and threw her arms about him.

"O Richard! Arthur and I are good friends again, and you are to live with us, and we will do everything for you. Kiss me, Richard." He did so very willingly.

"And when I am hard and cross with you, you

must not mind, — it is only because I love you, and cannot bear to see any one I love do wrong. But I won't be — I will be good to you; then you will like me too, perhaps, as well as Rebecca."

"I am beginning to like you now," he said, looking admiringly at her. "You are prettier than Rebecca," and, with that new look of happiness glowing in her eyes and flooding her with its radiance, she deserved his praise.

CHAPTER XXV.

A WEDDING CEREMONY.

THEY were married soon after, their old minister, Mr. Barnes, performing the ceremony. The recent heavy loss he had undergone in the death of his little son was shown in his look of sudden age, and his trembling tones gave a new pathos to the words he spoke. It was Arthur's little namesake, lying in the last stages of the terrible disease that had stricken him, whom Rachel had heard her father and sister talking about, and her own happiness was shadowed by the affliction of her beloved pastor.

The wedding took place in the presence of a few friends, her father giving her away. He had made little opposition to the marriage though evidently unreconciled to it; but the knowledge of the uselessness of any interference, and a little rebuking counsel from his minister, had restrained him from giving expression to his feelings.

Mr. Barnes was sincerely glad of this reunion between his two favorites and hoped much from the marriage, though he found it difficult to explain just what to those who regarded it differently.

There was a look of tender gravity on the bride's face. She went through her part in the ceremony without break or hesitation, pronouncing her responses in the clear, firm tone of one who took in their full import, while Arthur's voice was still weak from the illness he had not yet recovered from and the excess of his new happiness.

Virginia Howard, with whom a wedding was always a source of mystery and delight, looked on with a sympathetic face. She forgot the little grudge she had held against the bride, and offered her congratulations with a heartiness that could not fail to win a response.

"I am sorry we have seen so little of each other," she said, in the height of her generous feeling, as she held Rachel's hand in hers.

"I am sorry, too," Rachel replied, looking at her with grave candor; "it has been my fault." Virginia would not admit this, but the confession aroused a warm enthusiasm for the one who had made it.

"St. Cecilia!" she exclaimed in a tone of scornful disparagement, as she walked home with her husband. "St. Cecilia never looked so pretty as that."

"St. Cecilia never wore a gray silk with lace trimmings," was the reply. As Virginia's husband, Howard's eye was becoming skilled in the

intricacies of the feminine toilet, but his private feeling was that St. Cecilia was degenerating.

It was not until the leaves began to fall that Arthur took his wife back with him to his home in the West. She had never been on a journey of more than a hundred miles before, and entered into every new experience this one brought her with child-like zest. They travelled by slow stages, stopping a few days in Chicago, and at other places along the route to see the sights and do a little holiday-making. As they drew near their place of destination Rachel's spirits began to flag. She grew silent and thoughtful. Since her marriage she had yielded herself wholly to the joy of her reunion with Arthur. All topics that could raise an unpleasant thought or foreboding had been tacitly dropped between them, and so far their lives had glided smoothly along over the surface of things, taking nothing into account but their present happiness. Such a state of affairs could not last long with two such natures as theirs. Both began to realize, as they drew near the end of their journey, that their play-day was over, and that the feigned unconsciousness in which they had been living for weeks must be exchanged for a grave recognition of new and difficult duties.

Rachel knew it was in quite another character than her own that she would be received in her

new home. Arthur had told her very little of his friends, and they could know nothing of her. However kind they might be they would be strangers in the double sense of personal non-acquaintance, and those new, inexplicable ways of thinking she had to set herself to work to understand and try to approve.

It was the enforced publicity of her new position, the conspicuous place she held as the minister's wife, where every private wish and thought were liable to become the object of the curious scrutiny of others, that she found most unbearable. Once she had courted the thought of the additional responsibility and importance such a position would bring, but not now when, in the state of mental perplexity that increased from day to day, she longed above everything else for solitude. The sense of friendliness is never so complete as when we are forced to live in outward observance of principles and standards alien to our own. This outward observance of the duties of her position Rachel did not fail in, one thing remaining clear to her in the midst of the painful thoughts that crowded her mind during this period of her life in Elk Rapids. She was Arthur's wife. Both her love for him and her conscience forbade her to hinder or embarrass his work by any expression of her own different ideas. So much of wifely help and faithfulness had been implied in her

marriage vow and carefully considered before she took it.

Her husband, who watched her with a tender anxiety at this time, reading all her thoughts more clearly than she knew, met this generous resolve with one like it on his own part, shielding her from intrusive observation, evading for her the acceptance of those numerous posts of honor and responsibility which fall to the minister's wife, and covering her with a lover's thoughtfulness, which made her heart grow warmer towards him each day.

A perplexing relation existed between the young wife and Lucy Hunt, each of whom owned a strange feeling of mingled distance and attraction towards the other, at the same time that some element of secret distrust and uncertainty held them apart, and a spirit of timid reserve marked an acquaintance that should have blossomed into a loving and helpful companionship. Arthur had had a fatuous hope that they would become friends at once, and suffered that puzzled discontent most of us feel when we fail, as we generally do, to bring two valued friends or acquaintances into the same perfect regard and admiration for each other which we hold towards both. His wife was not ignorant of this feeling, and the little feminine perversity it gave rise to may have served as an unrecognized motive to her behavior.

"Why does not Miss Hunt come to see me oftener?" she asked him, once, overcoming her reluctance to discuss the subject with him, and speaking in a peremptory tone, that seemed to charge him with some special knowledge of his own.

"I don't know," Arthur replied; "I fancy she is a little afraid of you."

"Afraid of me!" in a tone of contemptuous unbelief. "She must be easily frightened. Is she afraid of you, too?" flashing a quick, challenging look at him.

"That doesn't necessarily follow. I am only the minister; you are the minister's wife, a much more formidable person, and usually more difficult to appease," smiling a little.

She made no reply to this, bending a little anxious frown on him, while her thoughts took a swift, backward leap over the past. The two years she was separated from Arthur still stretched themselves out to a hopeless length of suffering and dull despair, whenever she recalled them, even though they were safely passed and ended now. Those years, so empty of everything but pain to her, had yielded rich fruitage to him, despite the unhappiness she had caused him. Suffering, that so often stops growth in women, seemed to have promoted his. He had won new knowledge of the world, wrestled with

difficulties, and gained in manly strength and experience. To his wife's half-worshipful imagination, heightened by the state of moral self-disparagement, in which she dwelt almost continually at this time, he seemed far above and beyond her; forced to dwell apart from her in those labors she had once hoped to share as they did the common daylight.

What he had missed in her he must have learned to find elsewhere. This young woman they had been speaking of, whose loving, intelligent nature showed in every word and action, whom everybody praised for her goodness, her husband's recognized friend and ally, knew him better, perhaps, than she — the wife — did. With Lucy Hunt he could talk freely and without reserve on those topics, where, with her, he must weigh each word, careful not to pain or offend her.

Such thoughts had made her miserable many times before, and they swept over her now with an irresistible force, that left behind a sharpened anguish of belief. Her silence drew her husband's attention, who turned to look at her, and found her mournful, accusing gaze fixed upon him. It was impossible not to read its meaning, and the conscious color stained his cheek, as, in a little momentary confusion, he turned away.

"It is true!" she exclaimed, taking a quick step towards him, "you did like her."

He recovered himself. "Oh, yes, I liked her," was the rather too careless reply.

"It was something more than that;" she spoke in a voice of distressed upbraiding. "You were in" —

He turned towards her with a calm, steady look, and she checked herself.

"Oh, I don't care if you were;" she broke down. "I deserved it. I know just how good and lovely she is, and she thinks just as you do. I deserve it all."

By this time he had her in his arms, and she sobbed out the rest of her trouble on his shoulder, held in his close embrace, a situation to cut short the most jealous grief.

"You are mistaken," he said, when she had grown quieter; "I never was," — stopping short where she did, in explanation of the thing in their minds. She looked up at him through her tears.

"Come now, I'll make full confession," he added, smilingly. She raised her head from his shoulder at this, but he still held her in his arms, compelling her to look at him. "I will admit there was a period — I think it lasted about eight hours — when I thought I wanted to be."

"Thought you wanted to be!"

"Don't you know that Lucy Hunt is in love with Tom Fletcher?" he asked, still regarding her with an amused smile.

"Oh, so it was because she preferred Mr. Fletcher!"

Arthur had rather stupidly overlooked this sort of deduction from his remark, and looked at her in surprise, then laughed like a boy.

"Well, then, what was it?"

"Nothing but this," he made answer, when his merriment was over. "You see, about that time I got a letter. It wasn't much of a letter — about six lines and a half, if I remember, but it was written in such a warm and friendly spirit" —

Oh, for pity's sake, hush!" she exclaimed, wresting herself from his arms and quickly leaving the room.

Naturally, the people of Elk Rapids soon learned that Arthur's wife was not of the same religious faith as himself, and that she still held her place of honored membership in the church he had withdrawn from. The most considerate of these copied the young husband's example, preserving a careful reserve towards her and guarding her against annoyance, so that her position was easier than it might have been. Certain acute observers, under the influence of this knowledge, soon detected signs of a discouraging change in Arthur's preaching. Some of the more radical members of the church complained that he was growing conservative, and charged this backward tendency to the influence of his wife. Perhaps they were

not altogether wrong. Arthur was often conscious, during these days, of preaching to a single member of his congregation, her of the thoughtful face, often troubled and downcast, who sat in the minister's pew. Often when some bolder utterance of his caused a distressful shadow to flit over that face, or an appealing look to be raised to his, the impulse to follow this with some milder restatement, to modify and explain, was irresistible. His listeners noticed this, and wondered that he should give so much time to the exposition of merely elementary principles.

Though this fear of Arthur's growing conservatism was not wide-spread, nor very sincerely held, even by those most free to utter it, yet it added one more to those disintegrating forces at work in the society. The People's Church had not prospered since the minister's return, a number of circumstances conspiring to cast its fortunes under a temporary cloud. Judge Hunt was dead. He had been seized with a severe attack of pneumonia soon after Arthur's return, and died within a few days. The brave old iconoclast died as he had lived. Along with his inveterate dislike of the doctrines he had rejected ran a similar feeling towards all religious forms, the ceremony of the funeral included. His family had been many times instructed by him never to hold any religious services over his body. He wanted no

minister to come to pray over him dead who never prayed for himself while living. The remembrance of these instructions came back to him as he lay on his bed of pain, and seemed to trouble him a little. He had been the first to recognize the nature of his disease and, settling up all of his affairs with business-like promptness, he calmly awaited the end. His wife was sitting by his pillow the day before he died, when, seeing that he wished to speak to her, she bent nearer to him.

"I have been thinking, Lucy," he began in a weak whisper, "and I want to say to you" — he was obliged to pause from time to time to ease his painful breath. "Have it your own way, Lucy, have it your own way. It can't make any difference to me, — and we dead people should be careful how we trouble the living with their promises to us. 'Tis you who'll need the comfort of it, if there's any in it. There, there, Lucy, there, there!" — comforting the weeping wife. "You mustn't mourn too much for me, Lucy. We've had a happy life together, — you must think about that. And the children, they've been good children, and you'll have them still. Have it any way you like. It can't make any difference to me."

"But, husband, O my dear husband!" the crushed and stricken wife replied, "perhaps — we do not know — it may all be true. Oh, if I

should never see you again!" She broke down, hiding her face on the pillow beside his.

He longed to comfort her, to speak the one word that, coming from him, would bring lasting comfort to her. But the demands of his rigorous conscience were not to be set aside at such a moment, even for this.

"Perhaps, Lucy, perhaps," — weakly pressing the hand that rested on his heart. "But we've had a good life here, and I guess I've had my share. It's a good world for those who know how to use it; and if there's another" — Here a spasm of pain seized him and he could talk no more.

It was no wonder that the faithful wife, after receiving such instructions, should choose to pay literal regard to what she knew to be her husband's real wish. Arthur shared this feeling, and, setting aside the simple ceremony he generally used on such occasions, he read a selection from the judge's favorite poet, following this with a few remarks of his own.

In this generous strife of loving hearts to set the other before self and pay respect to the sincerity of the belief that differs from our own, we get nearer the heart of goodness than in any other way; emulating the divine wisdom and charity that have created the differences for some grand reconciling purpose He best understands. They

bore the body to its last resting-place, followed by a long procession of neighbors and friends, gathered from all ranks and classes, who had come out to pay their last tribute of respect to their most honored citizen.

The judge's death was nowhere more severely felt than in the little church whose cause he had, with strange inconsistency, it seemed to many, so earnestly espoused. About the same time another prop was removed in the withdrawal of Mrs. Hendricks, who had gone over to the Congregationalists to feed her emotions, where a new minister was preaching with much popular effect. Sickness and various circumstances had prevented the attendance of others, and the congregation had steadily decreased. Arthur would have resigned had he not been clear-eyed enough to see that this was but a temporary pause in the progress of the church, due to accidental causes for which he was not responsible. The society needed nothing so much just now as that spirit of faith, content to wait awhile, which he stood ready to give; but the directors looked at the matter from the single point of view presented in the pew-rents, and, meeting without Arthur's knowledge, voted to close the church. Arthur, who, aside from his anxiety about his wife at this time, had much to bear in the loss of his old friend, the disturbed condition of the church, and

the apparently unprofitable outcome of his labors, sat in his study one morning, lost in painful thought, when Rachel brought in a letter handed her at the door. It was short, and required but a glance to master its contents. The writer simply informed Arthur, without excuse for the abruptness of the news, and with seeming indifference to his feelings, of the action of the board. The hot blood mounted to his face, and an indignant exclamation escaped him, as he threw the letter on the desk. Rachel, surprised, took it up and read it.

"That is shameful!" she said, "when they knew that you were willing to stay, and that you did not care for the salary."

"But they do not want me to stay," rising in some excitement to walk up and down the room. "Doubtless they want some one else — some more popular man than I am. I was a fool not to see it in the first place." He felt bitterly wronged and humiliated and did not stop to pick his words.

"Some one else — a more popular man? Let them find him then. What does it matter what such people think?"

It was the first disparaging word she had spoken of the people among whom her lot was cast, and she trembled for its effect. She was also a little ashamed of it and would have recalled it but that Arthur, absorbed in his own feelings, had

not noticed it. He dropped into his chair again with a heavy sigh, a look of dark despondency gathering in his face.

"Don't feel so," she said, going nearer and placing her arm about his neck. "Don't care so much. It's not worth it, — it's the most shameful thing I ever heard of."

"Oh, there's no use in blaming them!" he said, drearily. "It is natural, I suppose, that if the church doesn't pay its expenses they should want to close it. It only proves what I was beginning to be afraid of: I'm a failure, that's all."

"You are not a failure!" she cried; "at least, what does it matter, if" — She stopped, hiding her face in his hair, that he might not see the thought she was ashamed to utter. A wild hope had sprung up within her that, now that he had tested this new belief of his, the results it had achieved, the kind of friends it brought him, he might be drawn back to the path of more assured success he had wandered away from. It was a fatuous hope, which she knew had no basis in any thought or feeling of his, and she would have felt forever disgraced in his eyes had he discovered it. Composing herself, she spoke again. "You can easily get another church — if you want it."

"If I want it?" he repeated in a surprised tone. He caught sight of her face. "You mean that you do not want it."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, flinging herself on his breast. "I do not mean that — how can you think I mean a thing like that? But oh," bursting into tears, "everything is so new to me, so hard to understand! You must be patient with me; you must give me time. If we could only go away somewhere — where we would have only each other. There is so much I want to learn — I am so ignorant. Take me away, far away from everybody. Then I will try, try to be better. Then I can think everything out. Take me away, take me," half-laughing now, as well as crying, in her hysterical excitement, "take me to Germany."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ABROAD.

THEY spent nearly two years abroad, wandering in leisurely fashion from one country to another, avoiding the path of the conventional tourists when they could, and following their own wish and whim.

In some places, like Florence and Rome, they stopped for months, making a diligent study of the art and historic treasures which those cities contain, and trying to thoroughly imbue themselves with that spirit of foreign civilization which hangs over them, with its strange, often incongruous, blending of old types and new, dead and living ideals. Paris, so brilliant and gay, the epitome of modern life and culture, they cared less for, especially Rachel. Wherever they went, it was the beautiful, ever-changing face of nature that most impressed and helped her. The mountains were a source of unmixed happiness to her, and when she caught her first glimpse of Mont Blanc her heart rose in a pæan of joy and worship. She would not join Arthur in any of his climbing expeditions, but saw him properly equipped and sent him off alone, waving her farewell from the

little balcony of the Swiss inn where they were stopping. Why should she risk losing that vision of those shining peaks which she already had by an attempt to reach nearer them? She found it difficult to believe, as Arthur hinted in reply to some such objection as this, that the wonder and beauty of the vision increased the higher you mounted towards it, and, any way, she was for the time more than content where she was. To Arthur the sense of climbing brought an exciting happiness of its own, and, as he mounted from rock to rock, skirting perilous passes and stopping to refresh himself with a look at the widening view about him, he felt himself a part of the grandeur with which he was surrounded, and his own labors seemed connected with the gigantic struggle the earth had undergone to upheave and throw those great masses into shape. But Rachel, whose late struggles had left her weary and with a doubtful sense of victory, was glad to reap a reward not dependent on painful effort.

They made a slow pilgrimage through Germany, charmed with its quaint, peaceful towns and perfecting themselves in the language. Rachel had plunged into study from the outset of their travels, especially of art and the languages, in which she soon became more proficient than her husband; Arthur choosing to make the living thoughts of men, the world's present deeds and

outlook, the subject of his study wherever they went.

Their stay in Florence was given up to an industrious study of its churches and palaces and the numerous historical and literary associations of that enchanting town. Here they read Dante's sonnets in the original, searched out the street where blind old Bardo lived, and looked reverently up at the windows of Casa Guidi. It was a soft, bright day in early May when they set off on a walk to the Protestant cemetery, famed as the resting-place of the most dearly-loved of English poets. Rachel took with her the little blue and gold volume which had been her favorite book since girlhood, thinking, in the artless fashion of the new traveller, that she should find some special inspiration in its pages, read in that sacred spot. She and her husband stood for a long time beside the narrow mound, speaking but few words, and in the low tone which became the place and their own thoughts.

"I will leave you here a few moments," Arthur said at last. "Wait for me."

She seated herself on a green slope near by, opening her book and meditatively turning the leaves, but not to read, as she had thought she should want to, something in the still atmosphere of the place bringing her into nearer communion with the dead poet than her printed lines could do.

She sat lost in a dreamful revery, not noticing the length of her husband's absence, when the approach of other visitors to the grave aroused her. Not wishing to mar the hour's perfection by listening to the talk of strangers, she rose and walked slowly down the path Arthur had taken. She had not gone far before she found him standing by another grave with bared head and folded arms. Something in his attitude, so devout and mournful, struck her attention and held her still a moment. She tried to recall the names of any other distinguished dead buried here, but failed. A singular reserve kept her from intruding on him for a short space, but curiosity soon overcame this feeling and she stepped forward to join him. He heard her and, turning, came quickly down the slight rise of ground, taking her arm as if to lead her back in the direction in which she had come. She resisted him a little, looking at the headstone he had so suddenly turned away from and then at him with questioning eyes.

"Who is it?" she asked, as he volunteered no answer to her mute inqury.

He hesitated a breath's space, and then mentioned the name.

A look of slight perplexity crossed her face and remained in the little puzzled frown between her eyebrows. For a moment she could gather only a slight association with the name. A little sense

of injury began to mingle with her disturbed feelings, as her husband made no offer to lead her back to the grave and seemed purposely to withhold from her the right to share his interest in it.

"Cannot I see it?" she asked with a little air of pique.

"Would you like to?" he asked in his turn, and led her back to the grave, where they stood before the tablet of dark sandstone with its simple inscription.

Rachel's thoughts began to grow less confused and she recognized more clearly whose dust it was that lay beneath the stone. But it was an imperfect knowledge that she had of the man or of what he had done and taught in his lifetime to make her husband hold his memory in such honor. She knew he was one of the leaders in that new, and she sometimes still felt dangerous, school of free inquiry to which Arthur belonged; but she had been faithfully trying of late to put aside her old opinions on such subjects in favor of more charitable ones, so that, altogether, she was in a state of painful uncertainty and stood hesitating what to say. She took refuge from this feeling in a simple remark.

"He was not very old," she said, studying the inscribed dates.

"No," Arthur replied, "only in sorrow."

She glanced inquiringly at him. "He was unhappy then?"

"I don't know that he was unhappy. I suppose no one is really unhappy who obeys his conscience." She meditated over this a moment.

"I see; you mean he was not well treated by others?"

"No, he was not well treated, but he never complained. He had hard and bitter trials to bear, but he never grew hard and bitter himself."

He drew a small photograph from his pocket and handed it to her. She looked at it attentively. It showed a dome-like brow and head with deep-set eyes, broad, firmly-closed mouth, but about which hung a tender smile, while the fringe of whitening hair and beard which enclosed the whole imparted a benignant grace to the general expression.

"It is a good face," she said, handing it back to him. She watched him as he put it carefully away in his memorandum-book and restored it to his pocket. "You think a great deal of him?"

"A great deal," was the reply. "I owe him a great debt. It was through his writings that I first learned — to see things differently."

She continued to regard him with anxious scrutiny, still failing to comprehend. They moved slowly away from the grave, but had not gone far before she stopped and seated herself on another

grassy knoll, while he mechanically threw himself down at her side.

"Tell me all about him," she said, turning abruptly towards him.

Then he began and told her the story of the man's life, whose written word still makes him a living presence in the world. He told it with the simple eloquence that springs from earnest feeling; and, though it did not arouse a similar one of grateful admiration in her own breast, it interested and moved her. Arthur dwelt most on the outward life and character of his hero, setting before her the picture of a great-hearted man, strong in all human sympathies and affections, and hungrily desirous of winning the returning love and trust of his fellows. He described that rare combination of intellectual force and scholarly attainment, the wide and varied learning gathered from all languages and times, with the spiritual depth and fervor which made this man the great prophet-preacher of his day. Lastly, he spoke of his gentle and winsome disposition, the fun-loving spirit that delighted to devise tricksy surprises for his friends, and that childlike gayety of heart that played over the sterner phases of his character, and was only shadowed, never destroyed, by the heart-rending sorrows he bore. He touched so lightly on the intellectual disputes with which his name was connected that Rachel was puzzled to under-

stand how it was that one so wise and good had been doomed to suffer such popular misunderstanding.

"What was it he did not believe in?" she asked when Arthur had finished.

"Well, the principal thing he fought against was the belief in miracles."

A cloud passed over her face. "He renounced Christianity, then."

"That is precisely what he did not do. He said Christianity was not dependent on the miraculous element; but he never thought of putting himself outside of the Christian name and fellowship."

She seemed a little relieved, but still not wholly satisfied.

"If you take away the miracles what is left to prove the worth and authority of Christianity above any other religion?"

Arthur refrained from saying that the question of authority was one which no longer troubled him. "I should say that the best way to estimate Christianity or any religious system is as a guide to man's conduct, by its power to make the world happier and better."

"Yes, of course," she murmured. After a few moments' silence she spoke again. "I don't see why it is so difficult to believe in miracles. Everything is a miracle."

"Yes, if you look at it in that way."

She turned her face away, feeling hurt and disappointed. Arthur had spoken in a careless tone that seemed to convey a certain contempt for this method of reasoning. Some way it often seemed to her of late that her husband did not try to help her much when their talk came round to these subjects, and she sometimes felt that he wished to avoid their discussion with her. Was it because he had come to put her on a lower intellectual level than himself? she asked. Did he think she was unable to comprehend and cope with those new, wide thoughts he stood in such familiar relation with? Or, what was worse, had he grown indifferent to her desire to understand and be wholly one with him?

Hearts that love each other best ask such questions sometimes, and pass through these periods of torturing doubt and distrust. No love is so strong that it can strip away that last barrier of just and delicate reserve in which our permanent self sits solitary. Arthur and Rachel Forbes dwelt together in a wedded companionship which seemed almost ideal to those who witnessed it, but nothing is quite perfect on this earth, and there were moments when each of these young people, so closely united and desirous of each other's happiness, stood halting and uncertain how next to proceed to help and understand the other. This is

often the case with the deepest and most sensitive natures. It is only the shallow mind that, like the running brook, reveals itself to the bottom.

But these periods of common shyness were in large measure the result of Arthur's morbid conscience and an unwise resolve to say or do nothing to hasten the progress of his wife's changing opinions. Though he continually observed and was tenderly concerned for her, a mistaken pride and whimsical sense of honor held him in that spiritual aloofness which she construed into indifference. He had persuaded himself that by his very love for her he was bound to use no undue influence over her, but leave her nature free to act and judge for itself. Add to this that he was the man and she was the woman, and that the freedom he so willingly bestowed on her was of a kind whose pain of loneliness he could not feel in the same degree as she. The woman he loved was his now, and that knowledge alone sufficed for his happiness. More than most husbands he understood and sympathized with the struggle he saw going on in her mind; but he could not in the very nature of things make it his own nor attach that supreme importance to it in relation to their married life which she did. As a rationalist he cared less and less every day for differences of opinion between himself and others, even those nearest to him; and he had grown so accustomed

calmly to analyze and speculate on these differences in his public teachings that he unconsciously applied the same impersonal methods to settling those nearer home.

Rachel, however, desired no such freedom as this her husband was willing to give her. To be different from her husband in the smallest particular was to be that much separated from him; and in the degree she failed to understand or agree with him she felt herself disappoint and fall away from him. What she wanted, and what she felt she once possessed, was entire community of every thought and wish. Such a disposition in women of less intellectual type, governed only by narrow domestic aims, makes jealous and exacting tyrants of them; but Rachel Forbes's nature was of a different order. That oneness of air and purpose which we would attain with the object of our love is a very different thing from the desire to possess and rule. An answer like this she had just received seemed to place a sudden distance between herself and her husband, and the wounded feeling which his words had aroused would not quickly abate, betraying itself in the trembling tone which marked her reply.

"I would rather look at it in that way than in the other. If one is to believe in God at all"— She stopped a moment to regain command of her voice. "I would rather believe in One that can

do everything — something at least — than One who can do nothing."

A half smile crossed her husband's face at the same time that he looked up in surprise at her earnestness. "There is not much choice in such a matter I should say. I don't know of any one who believes He can do nothing."

"Oh, but it is the same thing, — all this talk about law and order. If everything was done in the first place, — I would rather believe He can do something here and now if He likes," lifting her eyes to the blue arch above them.

"Yes, I understand you, only I don't suppose it is a question of what we would rather believe, but of what we may reasonably believe. We should try to find out the truth."

This was another of those answers which she disliked, and this time it not only hurt but displeased her a little.

"Do you mean that I am trying to find out the truth? Do you think that I care less about that than you do? Why do you turn my words against me like that? Was that the way he did?" glancing towards the headstone. "If it was, I don't wonder he made enemies."

Her husband looked at her in undisguised amazement, not in the least understanding this sudden outburst nor his own cause of offence. Her cheeks were flushed and two or three angry

tear-drops glittered on her eyelashes. He drew nearer and took her hand. "Dear Ray, what is the matter?" he asked in real concern.

She made no reply, turning her face and brushing the drops from her eyes.

At that moment a party of tourists emerged from a turn in the walk laughing and chatting. They cast some curious glances at the young couple and passed by, a light, teasing laugh floating backwards to indicate the nature of their comments on the scene they had just witnessed. Rachel had hastily withdrawn her hand from her husband's and risen to her feet in confusion, while Arthur, preserving his masculine calm, slowly followed her.

"I did not mean to turn your words against you," he said, contritely. "Of course I know you care as much about the truth as I. I only thought" —

"Oh, hush!" she interrupted, with a silencing gesture and a backward look at the group of fellow-travellers, as if in fear of their turning back and following them. "Let us go now," she said, stepping down the path. He took her hand and drew it through his arm, holding his own over it a moment in silent token of his repentance, and she began to feel a little ashamed of her impatience.

"But I doubt if you really want to believe that

something could happen here and now," he began again as they walked slowly on. "On the contrary, it is on that very assurance, which experience brings us, that nothing unusal, or contrary to the customary order, is likely to happen that our deepest faith rests. Did you never think how our sense of safety, which is only another expression for religious trust, springs from the conviction that to-morrow will be like to-day, and that all natural laws will continue to work as they have done? People talk about law being opposed to Providence when it is the only real Providence." She flashed a startled, half-acquiescent look at him at these words. "It is a poor kind of faith that rests on the constant expectation of the miraculous, compared to that which is content to take things as they are, and bases itself on the present integrity of things. I find more room for religious trust and aspiration in the thought of an orderly universe, controlled by unchanging law, than in that arbitrary system where law is continually broken and set aside; but there, I did not mean to preach you a sermon."

"I wish you would though," she said, looking earnestly up at him. "I never thought of it in that way before, especially about the safety of our belief in law. You mean such a feeling may become like that of religious dependence. I understand; I am so glad you explained it to me.

Why cannot I always see what you mean when you talk of these things?" raising an anxious face.

"Because I am neither wise nor good enough to teach you," he said with much feeling, bending and kissing her.

"I should like to be able to teach you something, too," she murmured, in a regretful tone.

"As though you had not; as though that were not what you were doing every day and hour of your life. What good thing is there in me that is not more than half you?"

There was a rush of glad tears to her eyes. "Really?"

"Really," smiling tenderly at her.

"And you do not mind when I cannot understand about these things?"

"Only as it gives you pain," he said, gently.

She seemed greatly moved at this. She could not deny the pain, but she said to herself that she would try to bear it better.

On their way out of the cemetery they paused a second time by the poet's grave, and Rachel stooped to gather a handful of wild violets there as a souvenir of her visit. "They ought to take some of these violets to strew on Savonarola's grave," she said.

Arthur did not understand, and she repeated a

few lines of the dead singer's, describing the old custom with which the Florentines honor their martyr-prophet.

"Savonarola was badly treated and punished for his opinions, too," she said, looking thoughtfully at her husband.

"Yes."

"There have been a good many;" and again he answered, "Yes."

"I suppose you think Parker was as great a martyr as Savonarola?" she said with an indescribable accent.

"Oh, no!" was the reply. "Parker never thought of himself as a martyr, and it is false glorification on the part of his friends to call him that. But I suppose if they could have exchanged centuries each would have been found doing about what the other did. Each was sure to be a leader and a reformer wherever placed."

"Then, Savonarola would not have believed in the miracles?"

"Probably not."

"And Parker would?"

"Um-mm," smiling a little at his own unwillingness to follow the due course of the argument. "Well, I suppose it is as fair to conclude the one as the other. I can hardly conceive, though, of Parker's arranging for a miracle and depending on it to save him at last, and then hav-

ing to endure the public ignominy of a disappointment."

"You mean he was so much greater that the miracle would have been granted him?"

He turned a puzzled face towards her. A demure smile trembled at the corners of her mouth and tried to conceal itself beneath her drooped eyelids, and he broke into a merry laugh at his own expense, too loud for the place, so that she quickly checked it. It was so delightful to him that she could drop the strained intensity of her usual manner when talking on such subjects, to indulge in a harmless jest, that he joyfully accepted his defeat and continued to give way to little bursts of amused laughter as they turned from the grave and walked towards the gate.

There they met the same party of tourists who had passed them before. Arthur, who had again drawn his wife's arm through his, was leaning towards her, addressing some teasing remark to her that must have contained a word of fonder import, for she flushed and turned her head away in that pretty attitude of silent attention and happy shame which women assume when compelled to listen to a kind of talk they like, but feel they ought not to encourage. Both caught the smiling glances directed towards them by the strangers.

"Those people again!" she exclaimed under her breath as they passed out into the street.

"Never mind," he made soothing reply. "They see that we have made up, and are glad of it. Perhaps they think we are lovers."

"Then they are mistaken," she said, raising her head a little.

"Yes," he replied, pressing her arm closer to his side. "That is a term that only describes about half the truth."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTERWARDS.

RACHEL reaped a rare happiness and profit from the experiences of her life abroad, or drooped and suffered under them, according to the mood that ruled her. The world grew continually larger to her vision, so large at times and so endless in the wonderful achievements of the past and the boundless stretch of the unseen future that the effort to grasp it all wearied her. At such times her thoughts took grateful escape back to the life she had led in her early home: the country village with its simple tastes and ways; the old-fashioned cottage where she was born, and the low-roofed chamber where she used to sleep. She could smell the purple lilacs by the gate, hear the sonorous note of the Sunday-morning bell calling to church, and see herself sitting in her father's pew near the desk, with the composed and friendly faces of the congregation surrounding her. A rush of tears clouded the vision. It had been a cramped and narrow life which the recollection of these symbols brought back to her — she could see that now; but it had been a safe and a sheltered one, blest with a heart security this other,

so much richer and fuller, had so far failed to bring. Would she never find it again, that restful content and sense of assured right and strength which had supported her like a bulwark in those days, or had she purchased liberty only at the cost of all the old sweet trust and peace?

The mood which gave rise to such questions passing, another of glad exultant happiness would seize her, and all her doubts would vanish like ghosts that cannot bear the touch of daylight. Under the influence of this new feeling she seemed at times to be borne far aloft to some mountain-top of observation. The universe lay mapped before her, and she caught glimpses of the whole long stream of human events, past and to come, the world with its myriad deeds and hopes marching past her in triumphal procession, herself and her own small, but needed life, falling into right relation with the rest. It was in such moments that she knew herself to be sustained by a faith larger than any she had known before. That, based on a single interpretation of the world's existence, dropped out of sight and another took its place, as wide and loving in its scope as the bending heavens, owning proud and grateful fellowship with every soul that struggles, suffers, and aspires.

A nature like Rachel Armstrong's never escapes its growing pains, and to the end of life her mor-

bid and exacting conscience stood ready to impose some new check on every new process of mental and spiritual growth. The instinct and love of beauty warred with her sense of right, and peace was purchased only at the cost of some belief or affection almost as dear as the thing it paid for. But her conscience helped as well as hindered her. It compelled her not to shirk her duty here, more than elsewhere, and to look her situation clearly in the face. The old beliefs and standards were brought to a new bar of judgment, face to face with the needs and conditions of her new life. Where they failed she sorrowfully but unreservedly laid them aside, as one buries the memory of a friend in whom some grave fault has been discovered. It is hard to believe, but such losses enrich the nature more than the choicest possessions of faith and knowledge. Rachel's nature had never been the most loving, and would always incur some just reproach of coldness; but she had never cared for and pitied the world so much as now; never so longed to spare others suffering, especially the heart of simple belief and trust. As she stood in the dim aisles of some cathedral and watched the poor, toiling worshippers come and go, kneeling at the altar to catch a moment's benediction and refreshment from the burden of the day, she always felt the impulse to place herself beside them, that she might not seem to shame

their credulous faith by standing apart, and in the hope, too, that some ray of real blessing might come down to her.

Both Arthur and she had a feeling of contented lonesomeness as they went wandering from one strange town to another, and across unknown countries. She had never grown tired of it, nor did Arthur acknowledge that he had, until they found themselves again in London. Here, where he felt himself so much nearer home, he was compelled to ask himself how much longer he had a right to remain away. A strong feeling of homesickness came over him, an irresistible longing to be back in his own country and at work again. He dreaded Rachel's discovery of this feeling, knowing what rich benefit she had reaped from this undisturbed companionship of theirs, and disliking to call her back from the dreamful life they had been leading.

The immediate cause of his homesickness lay in the batch of letters from home found waiting them at their banker's. There was one from Hester telling of the removal of Chase Howard from Dennison to the city where he and Virginia came from, and where he had accepted a second call to his father's place at St. Mark's. The first of two letters from Tom contained his wedding cards. He was married to Lucy Hunt, and had brought his wife to the city, where they had set up house-

keeping on one of the avenues. He wrote that Lucy was spoiling him by waiting on him so much, but as she was compelled to bestow on him alone those attentions she had once divided among the large family at home, it was a charity in him to indulge her. In the second letter Tom told Arthur of a pulpit he could have if he chose to return and take it. The position was a good one in one of the larger towns near Chicago, and Tom strongly urged his friend to accept it, abusing him for laziness in staying abroad so long, and bidding him answer by cable. Arthur was sitting in his room, and had just finished the letter, holding it in his hand, when Rachel entered. She had been taking a walk, and the London fog had been doing its worst to spoil her appearance, but had made a signal failure, twisting her hair into rebellious little ringlets that hung over her forehead and imparting a moist glow to her cheeks. She was dressed in a dainty Parisian suit, with gloves and hat to match, but the little, though not unpleasing air of rusticity she had always worn, had not quite disappeared. She would never have the assured bearing of the woman of society, like Virginia; and her manner, though it showed a growing ease and unconsciousness that experience of the world alone brings, was always a little constrained.

"A letter?" she asked, as she came and stood by her husband.

He had begun folding it when she entered, and was about to put it out of sight, not intending to show it to her just then. When he told her that it was from Tom, she asked, with an injured look, why she could not see it. He then put it in her hand, rising to go over to the window and looking into the street while she read it. Turning back, their eyes met, as she, having finished the letter, stood looking at him with a thoughtful and rather disturbed face.

"It seems a pity you should lose such a chance," she said. They had made their plans for a trip through Scotland, which they had missed when they were in England before.

He said "Yes," but spoke with an effort.

"What a good friend Mr. Fletcher is!" summoning as cordial a tone as possible, mindful that she had not liked Tom. "He got the position at Elk Rapids for you, did he not? Of course, you can easily find another place when you get back."

He did not reply. Something in this silence, and in his manner, as he turned away to hide his face from her, struck her, and she looked at him a moment with startled attention.

"Are you sorry?" she asked.

Still he made no answer. She did not know until now, when the whole subject of his return to his work seemed to sit so lightly on her, the real extent of his disappointment, and he lost the

power for a moment to conceal it from her. She took a quick step towards him, placing her hand on his arm, and his pain-stricken eyes met hers.

"Why, you want to go!" she cried. "Why didn't you tell me so?"

He made a feeble effort to laugh and turn it off.

"Why, of course, you want to go; you ought to go. Mr. Fletcher is right; we have idled away too much time already."

"And you," he cried, clasping her in his arms. "Are you really willing to go? Because if you are to be unhappy, as I made you before"—

"What difference does it make if I am unhappy?" she exclaimed. "You have your work to do," rebukingly. Then, as this answer seemed to pain more than please him, "I shall not be unhappy; or, if I am, I shall deserve to be. See what you have sacrificed for me! Do you suppose I never mean to do anything for you? We must go by the next steamer;" and she urged him to go out and send his despatch to Tom at once. He told her that there was no such hurry as that; they could wait for another steamer, and in the meantime take a short trip into Scotland, as they had planned. But no; her mind was made up. They must go right away.

"Scotland!" she exclaimed, impatiently; "what do I care for Scotland?"

The deacon would have been seriously displeased

at this slighting reference to the country of John Knox and the Covenanters.

So Arthur returned and fell to work in his new place, where he still remains, the beloved pastor of his people and a preacher of increasing fame among the small band of liberal thinkers with whom his name is associated. Rachel is his faithful wife, but not that active sharer of his labors that many ministers' wives are. Though she has dropped many of the old beliefs she has never come to share the more radical convictions of her husband, remaining in that twilight land of faith, midway between the rejection of the old and the acceptance of the new. Nor has she been quite able to reconcile herself to the social bearings of her position. She never hints it to another, not even to her husband, who understands her feeling very well, however, but she does not like the kind of people with whom she is compelled to associate. The slighting tone and careless freedom of speech with which they discuss the most sacred themes, the ready jest and sarcasm, and the complacent patronage with which they speak of other sects less advanced than their own, offends her deeply. On the other hand, she is forced to admit the high standard of conduct which rules among them, almost without exception. The men are honest and brave, the women just and true-hearted. They are good people, but she cannot like them. They,

on their part, admire more than they love their pastor's wife, all but a few, who are on terms of warm friendship with her and are never able to conceal their pride in her preference for them.

The criticism which was faintly voiced in his first parish also finds expression here, and Arthur is often accused of a growing conservatism due to his wife's influence. People wonder why such a progressive young man selected one so unlike himself for a life-mate, and some even go so far as to pity him because he is united to a woman who understands and appreciates him so little. The injured wife knows this, but she has her revenge, though it is a silent one. She watches her husband's progress with a heart both proud and pained, saying to herself, when some word of approval in which she cannot join reaches her ears, or when praise misses its mark and sounds more like blame, that there is no one who understands him as she does. These new friends may praise and affect to sympathize with him, but there is not one who really knows him. Unable to bear her part in all of his public work she jealously guards against all other claims every hour and moment she can call her own; not that she is really jealous, but because only in this way can she keep him the same Arthur she knew in her youth. Thus, along with his public life, which men see and acknowledge the benefit of, runs another, deeper

and sweeter, shut out from the world's observation.

Rachel pays a visit to her old home regularly once a year. Her sister, Mrs. Meredith, continues to live with her father, whose failing health has resulted in a growing gentleness of manner, so that his daughter finds it a pleasure to take care of him, and his grandchildren are no longer afraid of him. She has become better acquainted with her neighbor, Hester Forbes, and the two are good friends.

Hester still lives with her faithful Mary, and as the years go on the voices of children are heard in the old home, Arthur's and Rachel's, who never tire of visiting this best-loved relative.

The gift of motherhood holds its measure of help and blessing for Rachel. Her little ones have a richer childhood than her own was. She loves them with a passionate intensity of affection, which they sometimes feel as pain, and though they love her dearly in return, they are more at ease with their father. But always it is her husband who stands first to her above every other earthly relation. She sees many women with whom this is not so, where, through oversight or painful circumstance, the mother's joy and duty must suffice for the wife's as well, and she holds all such in a sad and wondering pity.

She goes to hear her old pastor preach when

she is at home, sitting by her father's side in the old pew. She is always glad to be at home again until the time comes to go back to Arthur, when the hours drag until she can start, and when she is at his side again she wonders how she could ever have gone away. To her it will always seem that contradictory feelings like these must stand for a rebellious and unfaithful spirit. The deeper harmony that more tuneful natures can discern in apparent discord is not given her to hear.

From the wreck of the faith and hopes once hers are two or three main truths which she has saved and clings to: that God lives, — He knows and can help her as no one else can, and will pardon all her shortcomings; that an abiding example of holiness and love has been given to the world in the Man of Sorrows, whose crown of thorns each of his disciples must in turn submit to wear; that life and goodness here mean a better life and more goodness to come. Thus she tries to bear, rather than to set aside, the doubts she cannot solve, to disown the pain that looks like ingratitude for blessings known and prized, and to reap such good as conscience will allow from the things that are given. She tries to do her duty, and, leaning her heart on One stronger, waits.

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